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GIFT OF
Mrs. William Denman

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THEY WENT

BY

NORMAN DOUGLAS

Author of "Old Calabria,"
"South Wind," etc.

Univ. of California

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1921

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THEY WENT

PART I

CHAPTER I

YOU could hear the waves moaning, out yonder.

There was no escaping from the sea. It hung like a menace, they sometimes said, over the low-lying city. Day and night that pungent salty odour invaded the town; for the ocean entered up a short river-channel into its very heart, the docks; and billows dashed lustily against the huge embankment or sea-wall which, at this hour of the afternoon, would have been crowded with folk but for those gusts of rain that kept them indoors. A warm summer rain, interspersed with flashes of merry sunshine. Green things were sprouting on the plain; the mountains, further back, had veiled themselves in mists. Here, in the streets, moisture fell in glad cataracts upon the pavements and spurted up again, buffeted by the wind, against the granite shop-façades or those polished marble fronts of the nobler palaces that shone like mirrors with the wetness.

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And a rainbow hung in the sky, an ordinary one. Nobody paid much attention. It was "a rainbowish sort of place," as the old king was often heard to remark.

Such were the splashings and drippings, and such the din he made himself with his implements, that old Lelian, working with his back to the half-opened door, kept on thinking himself quite alone. He was a cheery, muscular mortal who knew his craft and had made fine weapons in his day; it was not for nothing that he bore the title of Court-armourer. Who wanted armour nowadays? They lay about in corners, the old shields and swords and helmets cunningly wrought with his own hand; there they lay, a pitiful collection, rusting and forgotten. Often he looked at them, and shook his head dubiously.

He wore sandals and breeches of leather; his gaiters were fastened with coloured straps. There was a ring of copper in one of his ears, and his bare arms, issuing out of that sleeveless tunic, were encircled with bracelets of the same metal — common copper! His mouth was almost hidden under a drooping grey moustache; grey, too, was the long hair that tumbled from either side of his head, whose summit was cropped close, after the fashion of bygone days. All of which proved him to belong to that older

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generation, a generation of warriors. There were not many of them left now. They used to fight, in his time. They went to battle crowned with garlands, as to a feast; often enlarged their wounds purposely; always preferred death to dishonour. Those days were over. Nobody talked about fighting any more. It was an era of peace, of splendour and luxury, and wrongdoing. Those fountains and coloured marbles; the gold, the jewels, the steaming vapour-baths and colonnades and pleasure-houses and dancing-booths and — and worse! All those tawny-skinned merchants from foreign countries, clad in glittering robes — where would it end? Nobody, of course, could help liking the young princess who fostered these growths. Nobody could refuse her anything. Yet Lelian, like everybody else, had heard queer tales about her.

He shook his head more dubiously than ever, and pondered awhile.

Queer tales! If only her parents had seen fit to bring her up more strictly — to send her, for instance, to that far-famed college on the Sacred Rock ——

At this point of his meditations, he grew suddenly aware of a strange feeling. He was no longer alone. Eyes were gazing upon him from the doorway at his back. And before he had time to turn round, he heard the words:

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"Make me a mask, my good Lelian. A mask of copper. And greeting."

It was the young lady herself. Wet with the shower, she laughingly wrung out the drops from the thick-clustering hair which fell in a ruddy torrent over her shoulders. Her mantle of green was clasped by a belt at the waist; breast and arms were ablaze with precious stones, the envy of other women. No man ever saw them. She might wear what clothing or jewels she liked: they only saw her face. Or if by chance their eye lingered on such outward things, it was only to divine the shapely curves of her limbs underneath. She had been standing at the door unperceived for a short time, wondering what to say and how to say it. As usual, she had gone straight to the point.

There was nothing uncommon in the princess, thus unattended, entering the shop of an artizan or trader. It was a jovial, democratic place. The royal family — the two parents and their only child — were vastly popular, and the young lady herself, when she pleased, was more democratic than any one else and moreover, though only nineteen years of age — nineteen years, or perhaps a little more — perfectly capable of taking care of herself. She was on familiar terms with many merchants; in the case of a goodly number of them, it was at her own request that

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they had left their distant homes in South or East and settled down here to do business. As to old Lelian, she often consulted him about metals and enamels, for she was passionately fond of such things and had a workshop of her own in her tower. Not long ago, out of sheer caprice, she had even persuaded him to become a member of the Goldsmiths' Guild, a collection of foreign craftsmen who could poise an emerald in a ring as though it hung in water and tease the ductile gold into filagree work finer than a spider's web — men with whose aspirations he had nothing in common, and whose womanly delicacy of touch he neither wished nor tried to rival. Yet he yielded; who could refuse the princess anything? Had he not watched her growth with a kind of scared joy, and fashioned brooches and bracelets for her, in sport, when she was still a little child? She always loved things of price and beauty, though now, with growing years, her tastes had expanded; no longer content to frolic with metals, she worked her will upon men and houses and streets. The city had become her plaything.

Often she came to see the armourer. She liked him, above all, because he could hold his tongue. The princess, like everybody else, had a reputation to keep up.

"A mask," the old man began, hesitatingly.

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What kind of mask, he wondered. For what purpose? He moved his implements about with an undecided gesture and then, suddenly mindful of his duty, drew up that square stool of oaken timber upon which the young lady had often rested. She remained standing. She seemed to be in a hurry.

"Like this," she explained once more, going into its construction and mechanism. "And with a screw at the back, like this — you follow?"

The armourer nodded thoughtfully.

"It can be made, my lady. And shall be made. But ——"

"Oh, for fun."

Her notions of fun were not those of everybody; they were almost peculiar to herself. This mask, for example — it was quite an original idea of hers. She was tired of poisons.

"Nothing easier, my lady," he began again. "But, I was going to say, a screw of that kind, if incautiously pressed, might hurt or even suffocate the wearer."

It is possible, though not likely, that she would have answered, "that is precisely what I want it for": she stopped short in time. The door opened wide and, together with a gust of warm wind, a young boy entered the room. This was Harré, aged about twelve, a sturdy imp who had

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been bred among the remote and fierce tribe of the Alloquisti. Nearly everybody disliked Harré save the princess, who had discovered him in a curious manner and now found him useful for household purposes. He was clothed at that moment in a deerskin, and the rainwater ran down his bare legs. What added considerably to his picturesque appearance was the fact that he was painted blue; blue from head to foot; blue of a bright celestial tint, extracted from a certain variety of the colour-producing plant which was found only in that distant territory. Like the rest of his savage race, he wore a deerskin on those rare occasions when he wore anything at all; a garment which in his case was made to hold together across the shoulders by means of a bow-shaped fibula of electron designed by the princess herself; the thing looked well, and was one of her earliest attempts in that composition.

He promptly unclasped it and, fumbling underneath, produced a package of some brown material held together by a hempen cord. It gave forth, on being opened, a shawl of finest texture, an exquisite product that came from far, far away — from the regions known as the Roof of the World. Some man of the East, some slender and dusky princeling, had once laid it, together with other gifts, at the queen's feet.

"Your mother sends this," he said. "She

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fears you may get wet. She implores and commands you to put it on. She also begs you ——"

"How did she know I was here?"

"I told her. I guessed it. I saw you go in this direction."

To look at the young lady's face, nobody could have divined at that moment how angry she was. She went on, quite kindly:

"What more, my child?"

"She begs you to appear at the palace tonight. There will be something of a feast. A wealthy Greek merchant is arriving: I forget his name. Yes, Theophilus! And also a new Christian preacher."

"What, another one?"

"His ship is already sighted from the North-West. And the quite-too-chaste-and-venerable Mother Manthis has sailed across and will doubtless be there. I think your mother fears there may be some dispute between her and the Christian. She always fears such little things."

"Bother that druidess," said the young lady, who had other plans for the evening.

Harré always named the person in question by her full title and with the deepest respect, ever since one memorable occasion when the old lady had proved to him that she, at all events, was not to be trifled with. Manthis, the arch-druidess, tolerated no nonsense, least of all from

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what she called "mere males." She kept a kind of college or seminary for young girls on the Sacred Rock, the largest of a group of islands which rose out of the sea a couple of miles off. As a member of the highest aristocracy of the land, and also in virtue of her sacerdotal and political character, she put in an appearance at court as often as she could; as often, that is, as she could spare time from her pupils. The girls were uppermost in her mind; all else was subordinate to their welfare. She worked for them, and them alone, out on that island. Not that there was lack of evil-speaking in the town, even in regard to so austere and transparently upright a personality as Manthis. Men whispered that she used to live on the borders of her little lake in the character of a Groac'h or wicked fairy, entrapping young men to her underground palace by means of a boat shaped like a sleeping swan, and there transmuting them into fishes or frogs for mysterious purposes of her own. Others, equally ignorant or malicious, claimed that she was the last survivor of a company of nine abandoned women who, vowed (as they said) to perpetual virginity, dwelt on that sea-girt rock under the pretence of worshipping the chaste moon; terrified sailormen had seen them, each clad in a single garment, dancing nocturnal rounds on the lonely beach or sailing landward

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under the stars to meet their lovers. Whoever set eyes on Manthis might well marvel how such tales could ever have arisen.

The princess was not thinking of those legends just then. She was thinking of herself. She seldom thought of anything else. "That explains," she mused, "why they want me at the palace tonight."

The queen was always anxious to avoid trouble and discussions; she hated what she called "scenes," especially at court. It was so easy, she declared, to demean oneself in friendly wise with everybody! Perhaps she foresaw that there might be words between the druidess and this new Christian preacher, as in the case of his predecessor. Manthis could doubtless be trusted to do the right thing in every emergency; she could keep her temper like any other high-born lady. And all would have gone smoothly on the first occasion but for that particular Christian missionary — the only one, up till then, that had ever set foot in the town — who turned out to be such a violent venerable that things had ended, between himself on the one side, and the druidess and court and citizens on the other, in a complete misunderstanding. A complete misunderstanding! Which was a pity, for the townsfolk, as well as the royal family, were nothing if not well-disposed towards strangers.

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"Scenes" of this kind, the queen decided, must never occur again; apart from all other reasons, they were bad for the old king's health. And hitherto they had been successfully avoided. Such was the tact and innate kindliness of the royal couple that no scandal ever occurred since the days of that first Christian —"peace at any price" had become the watchword of the entire court.

This, then, was the reason why the queen was anxious for her daughter to appear that evening. And also to enliven the assembly in general. For life at the palace was dull, and it was observed that whenever the princess showed herself and came away from her beloved tower — which was fairly often, seeing that, like a good girl, she always gratified her parents when she could spare time from her own occupations — there was more laughter and joy than usual in that rather formal gathering.

"Go and wait outside the door," she now said to Harré. "And here! Take this dreadful woollen contrivance with you. Fancy asking me to wear it! What next?"

She presently followed him, after a few final words with the armourer about her new toy. They stepped together into the street and soon reached an open space with arches running round it, and fountains and flower beds in the

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centre — it lay beside the harbour where countless ships were moored, one beside the other, in the still green waters. The shower had ceased; a gleam of evening sunshine was breaking through the clouds.

The princess enquired:

"Did you hear, as you entered, what I was saying about the brooch?"

"In that wind and rain? How could I hear anything?"

"Now listen, Harré. Why did you tell my mother where I was, since I have forbidden you to do so? Why? Look at me."

She glanced so strangely into his eyes that he began to tremble all over. It was not the first time she had looked at him like this, and under that scorching fire all his impudence seemed to wither away.

"Why?" she persisted.

"I forgot. I also thought you would like something to protect you from the wet."

She was wearing a necklace that hung loosely over her bosom, a necklace of male carbuncles; they glowed with a crimson light and were set in massive gold. Now she raised her arms and detached its clasp beneath the thick hair that streamed down her back. Then, taking the jewel in her hand, she began to count the stones along one side. At the eleventh she paused, and

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rubbed away the moisture on its surface. Laying her hand on the boy's shoulder, she said in gentle fashion:

"You know something about pigs, don't you, Harré?"

'Don't I?" he replied, his heart swelling with Alloquistian pride. "Our pigs are the finest in the world. They are so big and strong and fleet of foot that no stranger can approach them, and if ——"

"I thought so. Now look through that stone, and tell me what you see. Hold it before your eye. Close the other eye. Look into the sun."

He did so.

"All red," he replied. "Like blood."

"Look again. What do you see?"

"I see — ah, how strange! I see a little pig. It is tied to a stake by one leg, and a man is beating it with a crooked stick. It cries all the time. I can hear it."

"Look more carefully. What else?"

Harré hesitated long before replying. At last he said:

"I see nothing more. It is always tied to that stake, and always being beaten, and always crying. The poor little pig! It cries very badly."

"That is what I shall do to you, Harré. I shall turn you into a little pig like that one, and lock you up in a stone like this one ——"

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"Oh!"

"Yes. But I shall not wear you round my neck. I shall take you in a boat a three months' sail beyond the Sacred Rock, and drop you to the bottom of the sea. There you will lie deep down, all alone among the weeds, always tied up and always crying ——"

"Oh!"

"And always being beaten with a crooked stick, if — if ever you disobey me again," she added in a more kindly tone of voice. "Now look at me."

He looked, and saw that her wrath had fled. The horror of the vision endured. He knew that she could keep her word, and would. She was well capable of such a deed, if only for fun. There was no doubt whatever that the princess, for all her youth, had drunk of the water of Entri and was already a magician. Nobody but she, thought Harré, could have talked over those dwarfs and made them do her bidding. That alone proved her power.

Then, remembering the dwarfs, he began to smile once more. What a trick he played them! And how well everything had turned out! For it was better, assuredly, serving this beautiful lady than guarding swine with the Alloquisti, among the damp woods and bracken and standing stones, and being beaten by a stern blue

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father and a stern blue mother every single day of his life.

Meanwhile they moved forth again along the quays towards the great sea-wall or embankment whereon stood the tower of the young lady, Harré walking respectfully behind his mistress, with the bundle underneath his deerskin. The sun shone; tall buildings still trickled with moisture; it sped gleefully down the gutters and found its way at last into the Great Drain — that masterpiece of engineering which had cost its famous Roman builder, Ormidius Limpidus, much anxious thought. It ran far out to sea, close beneath the lady's tower, and some said there was a secret stairway from her apartments right down to its sullen black waters. Nobody knew the truth of this, and the Great Drain itself told no tales.

And now they had climbed the embankment against whose granite foundations the tide was ramping and raging.

"Your lady mother will be sitting out yonder," said Harré.

"Likely enough. And doing her embroidery. And singing that venerable song. Poor old thing! She never changes."

The sky was full of wetness and joy, and streaked with gold like a lion's mane. Of such a hue, like a flaming wisp torn down from the

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glory of sunset, was the lady's hair; one would have called it red, but for the fact that she happened to be a princess. It was a prodigy, this hair, for that of all the other citizens was black or brown by nature, though some ladies tried to imitate her ruddy tint by means of soap made from tallow and the ashes of a certain tree. And her eyes were green; green as moss, or as those tangled ribbons of emerald that sway mirthfully among their dun companions in the water of rocky sea-clefts. There was something of the untamed beauty of the ocean in her look and carriage; something of the wildness of Aithryn whom the countryfolk in their simplicity, believing everything distant or unknown to be miraculous, held to be a legendary sea-god.

For nobody in the town had ever beheld the Aithryn of flesh and blood, that rather stupid man — Aithryn the menace, the predestined destroyer; nobody save the queen, and that was nineteen years ago — nineteen years, or perhaps a little more.

She, poor old thing, had taken him for a friend; for somewhat more than a friend.

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CHAPTER II

IT was the business of Ando, the court prophet, to "keep it up," that is to say, to prevent the conversation at palace entertainments from flagging, as it sometimes did. When sufficiently sober, as he sometimes was, he might be heard to descant on this wise:

"We have seen it in the land of the Chauci ——" and there he generally paused, to gain attention.

"What have we seen?" one of the guests would ask, more out of politeness than for any other reason. Ando's stories were fairly well known; that of the Chauci in particular. He was going to say something to flatter the king, the founder of the city; something about that stone embankment which he had built.

"How, from the dawn of time, there has been sullen rivalry between land and water. They are always stealing marches on one another. The sea strives by force or guile to encroach upon the earth; it engulfs whole cities beneath the waves, and secretly, in days of summer calm, gnaws away the foundations of headlands and islets. They crash asunder, toppling down in

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wintry gales, and water gleams where rock once stood. Elsewhere the land thrusts forth promontories and spits, stealthily driving back the sea from its old haunts. Then came man ——" Here he would pause again.

"What of it?" the civil guest would ask.

"Man took sides with earth. He embittered the strife. Long ago he went in simple-minded hordes, armed to the teeth, to fight the tides which threatened to roll over his fields; soon he constructed ships that mocked the storms; he built dykes and stole unnumbered leagues of old ocean-meadows like those of the Chauci which happen to be still unreclaimed; he drove piles into the waves, planting towns and pleasure-houses over their very heads. So the warfare proceeds. Like two bad neighbours, they continue to shift one another's boundary-marks, and the issue remains ever undecided. What land gains here and today, the sea will snatch yonder and tomorrow. But ——"

"What of it?"

"With us, my friends, the case is different. We are not Chauci, at the mercy of the floods. Our sea is driven out for ever and ever. Granite endures."

"Ah, that embankment! You are eloquent tonight, Ando."

"Eloquence and bravery: these be the two

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gifts of our race. Eloquence is mine; bravery, the king's."

"Enough, Ando, enough!" the ancient monarch (himself not remarkable for sobriety) would often interpose on such occasions. "Enough! It is lucky you are generally too drunk to be eloquent. Come, let us have another game of chess. That will make you brave and warlike for a change."

Manthis, the arch-druidess, called Ando an untruthful parasite, who sacrificed everything to his belly. She had not the slightest faith in that embankment; it was one of several reasons why she had moved her girls away from the town, out of harm's way, to the Sacred Rock. She had read the city's *Awenn,* or fate. It was doomed. A certain section of the populace known as "old believers"— the armourer Lelian was one of them — agreed with her. They had ceased to trust the embankment; they saw danger ahead ever since the death of that violent venerable, the first Christian missionary, who predicted ruin to the town in certain ominous words about "retribution from the sea."

Meanwhile, it stood firm. . . .

The wide plain on whose furthermost and westerly projection the city lay had all been filched from the sea, inch by inch, in times of yore. The waves used to lap against the very

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hill-sides; now they broke five miles out, or thereabouts. Those many streamlets descending from the heights had brought down, in the lapse of ages, their silt and sand and stones, driving the ocean back from its old shore. So things stood, ere yet the king had laid the foundations of his new capital. If in those days you looked from the heights toward the setting sun, you beheld a marshy level intersected by sluggish rivulets that crawled in wayward fashion about its surface; tidal creeks, rising and falling mysteriously as the sea, out yonder, drove its vital flood into them or coaxed it back again. It was an inhospitable tract, bearing nothing but grey sedges and clumps of dismal tamarisk that leaned landward and whistled sharply in the wind. Ghostly sea-mists scurried across; a mournful wail of curlew might be heard, and the heron would flap its wings disconsolately over the muddy expanse. No men dwelt here. The soil was too poor. Moreover, at certain intervals, when tides were unusually high and westerly gales blowing their fiercest, the ocean, as if resentful of this ancient insult, would reassert its right over the land. Then you might see water invade the reed-beds, creeping about stealthily till the whole plain was covered with a lustrous coating like glass; soon the surface would change into a weltering mass of billows —

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white-crested waves, rolling one over the other and galloping in frantic glee against that old hill-barrier of theirs.

"The horses of Aithryn," the countrymen would then say, taking them to be the white manes of the coursers of some sea-god that strove to regain possession of his former domain, of that land which had once been his. "Aithryn is jealous," they would add. "He wants his own back."

Ignorant folks, ready to believe anything! They fabled of Aithryn's palace beneath the waves, with columns of glowing amethyst and beryl; they told of his minstrels, his wives, his banquets; everything down there was much the same as on earth, only fairer — far fairer. . . .

Up to that time the king had dwelt in his old town near the foot of the hills — there, where the largest of those rivulets emerged upon the plain. He had constructed something of a port; small, flat-bottomed craft used to crawl up stream, their brown sails fluttering in the breeze or, on days of calm, drawn by horses that tugged them labouriously along the winding banks to that humble quay where the cargo, such as it was, used to be discharged. That was ended, now. Those days were gone and past. The old town stood deserted, its houses overgrown with ivy and bramble, its gardens merg-

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ing into the woodland at their back — woodland through whose glades you could wander, a three hours' march and ever up-hill, into the sacred druidical forest. Then, however — and that was long ago, the king being in his fortieth year at the time and the young princess not yet born — then it was the capital of a formidable realm. For the monarch had been nothing if not a warrior.

In his fortieth year he grew tired of fighting; tired, even, of hunting. His thoughts turned towards the arts of peace. He would devote himself henceforth to commerce and administration. How make his loving subjects wealthier and happier? The land was not deficient in riches; there were mines of copper and silver and salt, but what, he often asked himself,— what was the use of these minerals? They could not be exported to other countries in any reasonable quantity owing to lack of means, of transport and communications. There they lay — mere stones! "I cannot feed my people on stones," he often said. A harbour! He needed a harbour.

It was about this period that news was brought to court of a stupendous sea-wall erected by the ruler of the Berovingians; of the harbour which had sprung up in its shelter, of the ships that now called there, leaving a train of prosperity

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in their rear. He made enquiries among the few merchants who then frequented his capital, and learnt that this building of embankments was considered a fashionable occupation for royal personages; structures of such a kind were then rising up in every part of the world, the wisdom of their builders being immortalized by bards and handed down in chronicles to posterity without end. This gave him food for meditation. It struck him that he would like to do something of the same kind. Like all sensible men, he had no objection to becoming, as it were, immortal.

"I have it," he said one day.

Often had he looked down from his palace upon the broad and ugly level of swamp; often had he seen that bleak spit of land thrust into the waves, five miles yonder, by the central and largest of its streamlets.

"The place for a port!" he cried.

It would be warfare, too! warfare of the kind he liked best — into the enemy's country, into the realm of that domineering sea which on occasion was wont to gallop with impunity up to the very walls of this city. His terrestrial adversaries had all yielded to his arm. Now the sea should yield.

He mentioned the matter to his counsellors, having, like all sensible men, no objection to

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hearing advice, provided he could always do as he liked afterwards. Whatever arguments may have been employed, they agreed upon one point: that the druids must first be consulted.

"By all means," he replied. "Who would dream of acting otherwise?"

They dispatched an embassy which returned in due course, bearing a response to this effect: *Devour not salt with stones.*

"That settles it," remarked the monarch joyfully, before anybody else had time to think what the druids meant by those dark words. "That settles it! What have I often said? My poor people have nothing but salt and stones to eat. This state of affairs cannot be allowed to contine. You hear, now, what the Enlightened Ones have commanded: devour not salt with stones. Our miserable inland life must end. It seems to me, friends, that all my previous exploits in peace and war shall count as nothing in comparison with this new one. Let me be assured of your hearty co-operation, and woe betide him who endeavours to thwart our wishes! If we cannot create an heir to the throne, (it was the bitterest disappointment of his life that his married union had hitherto not been blessed with children) we can at least create a harbour, which, as you will presently find out, is a great deal

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better than nothing. We can; and will. So help us, Belen."

As though to drive away the last shred of doubt which may have lingered in the sovereign's mind regarding the advisability of his enterprise, he was visited, while he lay that night in sleep, by a strange and lovely omen. A pink porpoise came flying into the window of his chamber and, after whirling silently round the room three or four times, sat down on the pillow beside his head and began to laugh immoderately.

"What are you a king for?" it seemed to say.

He started up in blackest midnight with that laughter still ringing in his ears.

What am I a king for? he wondered. Now: what on earth does it mean? I give it up!

The queen was slumbering at his side. He nudged her gently.

"Leave me alone," she said in that peculiar voice, dead level and almost a whisper, which he had often heard her use on such occasions of nocturnal interruption. "Leave me alone. I am asleep. Don't wake me. In the morning——"

"Won't I wake you? This is very important, my dear, and not what you think." He began to pull her hair with needless violence. "Tell me, what am I a king for?"

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"Why, to do what you please. Only let me sleep again. I want to finish that pleasant dream. Where was I? Ah, I shall never catch it again ——"

"To do what I please. It is exactly what I thought. The porpoise — how it laughed! Wake up. Perhaps it will laugh again. Wake up; I like to converse. Are we never going to have an heir to the throne?"

"In the morning ——"

"In the morning. Always in the morning. And this is what one calls a wife. Something will have to be done about it. Well, well! The embankment shall make amends for your deficiencies as spouse and mother. We purpose to begin preparations without delay. We can; and will. So help us, Belen."

"In the morning. . . ."

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CHAPTER III

WORKERS were required for that great undertaking — slaves; an army of slaves. Preparations for a man-hunt on a larger scale than usual were begun and ended; the cavalry had been completely reorganized; those savage dogs of wolfish strain, each pack obedient to its own leader, were trained to the uttermost of their strength; old Lelian too — young Lelian, as he then was — had invented some wondrous new weapons for the occasion. So they left the town, and never did the sovereign's military talent shine forth with brighter effulgence.

He led his troops first against the more immediate neighbours, capturing, from one, seven hundred men or thereabouts; from another, four hundred and thirty, together with over a thousand women and children who had imprudently been left exposed and were soon exchanged for two hundred lusty men; among the Brambigones, further afield, he succeeded in taking, besides a number of warriors, the king's own daughter, an elderly girl who was ransomed for half a thousand males; the Volusinians, yet more in-

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land — he was to see them again, the Volusinians, forty years later! — they yielded, together with a host of ordinary captives, one single individual worth an army in himself, to wit, the Roman Ormidius Limpidus, an engineer of highest capacity who, after being detected in a disreputable intrigue with some high-born dame in the household of his own country's proconsul, (he never could leave ladies alone) had fled for protection to the ruler of these same Volusinians, and was employed by him at the time of his capture as court butler and, in spare moments, tutor to his twenty-three sons.

In fact, the raid was pursued to the very boundaries of the distant and fierce Alloquisti. Here the king drew in his victorious followers. Those Alloquisti had the reputation of being troublesome warriors — "prickly people," they called them. So little recked they of wounds that, instead of covering their bodies with armour like other fighting men, they actually doffed in battle their deerskins, the only garment they (seldom) wore, and fought stark naked like the blue savages they were — they hated their clothes being "hacked about"; so little cared they for the refinements of life that, instead of allowing their prisoners to be ransomed, they gambled them away amid shrieks of laughter, and tossed them into the cooking-pot. Here,

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then, the monarch paused and, having counted up the tale of his captives and discovered their numbers to be sufficient for the purpose in hand, turned homewards again.

"The Alloquisti can wait," he decided. "What do we want with blue monsters running about our new town? Think of our women!"

This, his last, was the most glorious and profitable of all the sovereign's campaigns.

Now Ormidius Limpidus was not a Roman for nothing. He knew his business. He rose to the occasion. He performed wonders. He surpassed himself. After selecting a group of competent subordinates and overseers, he opened quarries into the granite entrails of the hills; athwart the marshy plain was laid down a track of wood along which you might see journeying, day and night, an endless procession of bullocks and horses that dragged the huge building blocks to a certain piece of ground near the shore, where a troop of several hundred masons was employed in hewing them into shape. The work proceeded rapidly; never fast enough for the king, who now began to neglect all his other royal duties in order to *direct the operations,* as he called it. "If I am not on the spot," he would declare, "nothing is ever done." He could be seen enthusiastically carrying the stones about, or splashing himself with mortar; he swore that

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architects were the slowest people on earth — anybody but this cursed clean-shaven Roman would have finished the business in half the time. On such occasions, the engineer would tremble for his life, and implore the protection of his family genius. What if the king one day should lose his temper in good earnest?

Soon the great embankment and the walls of the city stood in their place; a noble aqueduct, bearing a river of water on its back, strode in gallant arches across the plain; and calmly, secure from every wind, the oval-shaped harbour lay in the centre of the town, replenished by inrushing tides and the water of that old streamlet which had been artificially deepened and widened to allow the largest fleet of vessels to rest at anchor within. Palaces had grown up, the royal residence first of all; not to speak of the Great Drain! Thus, in a remarkably short space of time, a town arose on that sandy spit where, in former times, not a blade of grass would grow. On a fixed day, there took place a transmigration of all the inhabitants from that former capital on the hillside, thenceforward abandoned to wolves and owlets.

Folks were delighted with the change of scene — all save the section known as the old believers — no one more so than the monarch himself. For if Ormidius had proved of some little

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use as executant, the idea of the town was undeniably his own from beginning to end. The Roman, on the other hand, in proportion as his task drew to its close, became less delighted. He waxed thoughtful, and ever more thoughtful. He was nothing but a captive; a most unpleasant state of affairs! Ormidius loved his life. Often he thanked Mercury and Jupiter Optimus Maximus and several other gods for allowing him to survive a little longer and fall into the hands of this race rather than into those, for example, of the mirthful Alloquisti. What would now happen? Would they sell him again — and to whom? Would they do him to death — and how? Roasted? Boiled? Or maybe, his term of service ended, throw him into his own masterpiece, that Great Drain which told no tales? He grew thin at the prospect; he took to skulking about and trying to look like somebody else; he was on the point of cultivating a moustache and wearing checked breeches like a Volusinian, prepared for anything save what actually happened when, one day, the king slapped him on the shoulder in jovial fashion and asked what reward he would like.

"A hundred female slaves," he replied modestly.

"You shall have them. And a house as well, wherein you can abide permanently. We may

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require your assistance on some later occasion. Pray don't consider yourself a captive any longer. I will not hear of such a thing. I always thought," he added,—"I always thought the Romans were solid people, from what I had been told of them. Now I know it."

In this house, accordingly, Ormidius Limpidus dwelt, giving advice on technical matters to all who cared to ask for it, since, like everybody else, he had a reputation to keep up; there he dwelt, living on that same reputation and on the sovereign's bounty and growing to be an old, old man with love of life and ladies unimpaired, till the day when he vanished mysteriously after a little misunderstanding with the princess — a mere child at the time, but one who had already developed architectural notions, and a temper, of her own — a misunderstanding about a certain cornice to her tower. . . .

It was a moist site, that of the new town, facing sunset and reeking with sea-mists. Though situated under a northern sky, breaths of warm wind and currents of warm water crept up to the shore, borne landwards by some tepid stream which flowed through the ocean from the other end of the world. The plain at the back, protected by a monstrous dyke, had meanwhile put on a new and smiling face. It was green with verdure, for the water-courses had been

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banked up and straightened — the soil drained and manured; countryfolk, living in willow cabins, planted on that once bare expanse their fruit trees and corn and flax and madder, their far-famed beetroots and cucumbers and every other kind of crop for the delectation of the citizens, and their own.

As for the town itself, it projected into the waves at the furthermost extremity of the plain, on either side of what had formerly been an unsightly creek, its streets and palaces enclosed within their mighty granite bulwark like the eggs in a blackbird's nest. To bar out the sea and prevent its waters from flooding the houses at exceptionally high tides, a massive wooden gateway had been let into the embankment at the point where ships entered to reach the harbour; it could be opened and closed by a simple contrivance, a kind of lock, of which the king kept the key. At first he hung it at his girdle from sheer caprice, and because he liked to watch the water filtering into the docks as he opened the gate with due ceremony; later on, he took to wearing it always and regarding it as a symbol or emblem of his royal power: could he not destroy the place, even as he had raised it out of nothing?

Such, then, was the city during that earlier period — a port, a thing of mere utility; for the

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princess, who transformed it into a thing of joy and beauty, into a wonder, was not to be born for twenty long years. Now was accomplished the task of driving the sea back from this old disputed territory. Vainly it ramped against the barriers, and sighed and moaned and clashed, striving to undermine their foundations. They held fast. Their builder was a Roman, who knew the properties of stone and cement; not for nothing had he studied, long ago, his Lucilius Galba and Varro's *Disciplinae* and Fabianus and Vitruvius Pollio and Quintus Niger and all the rest of them.

Men no longer talked of the "horses of Aithryn." They forgot his very name.

And yet, like many creatures reputed fabulous, this Aithryn lived, something of a pirate by hereditary instincts, a veritable king, human in shape and failings. The realm of the man who was to play so disastrous a part in the fortunes of the city lay among certain dim and distant northern islands, not unknown to the Phoenicians and later races, who imported therefrom their ingots of tin which crossed the ocean in frail barques of ozier, covered with hides; in later ages, again, there was commerce and rivalry and warfare between these same hyperboreans and those others on the mainland — warfare that lasted over a thousand years. In

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the meantime, owing to piracy and the troubled state of the world, old relations had been broken off and even forgotten, though some memory of former sea-raids may have lingered in that tradition of Aithryn's horses, of his being jealous and "wanting his own back." He himself had grown into a myth, a legend. So speedily are men changed into gods.

It was a strange coincidence that the only citizen of the town who knew of the existence of this Aithryn of flesh and blood happened to be the princess herself. She learnt a few details about him — not nearly as many as she would have liked — from the Greek merchant Theophilus, a provokingly reticent person, whom she was to meet for the first time that very evening at her father's palace and who, later on, gained so powerful an influence over her as to become her closest friend and inspirer. It would seem that Theophilus, a much-travelled man, had actually visited the court of Aithryn more than once, on some errand of business. How he reached it, and what the nature of that errand was, the young lady never discovered. She had glimpses, however, from his talk, of a region of sombre forest and moorland grazed by shaggy cattle, of bleak estuaries where they tumbled the fish in cataracts of silver out of the nets; she saw, in imagination, that huge town or village

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built of white fir-wood smeared with pitch, in whose centre stood the castle, a rambling structure large enough to shelter an army, and painted red and green — the king, he said, was "very fond of ornament"— in mazy, crazy, zig-zag patterns. As to Aithryn himself:

"His real name is Miliuc. There is nothing mysterious or wonderful about him. A dissembler, a worm of a man, and absurdly fond of his children."

There had been Aithryns from time immemorial, he went on; it was a kingly designation which descended from father to son, and signified nothing more than red or ruddy. All Aithryns were alike, male and female; all were golden-haired, of remarkable personal beauty, domineering, resourceful, cruel; aspiring souls and men of bold invention; and this one, he explained, might have been the greatest of his race had the promise of his youth not been cut short by an accident.

So she pieced together the information which Theophilus, at one time or another, was kind enough to supply her.

She gathered that a stroke on the head from a battle-ax during an encounter with some turbulent neighbours had changed the king's whole nature. Although the skull was trepanned, and the wound, treated with fomentations of elder-juice and the resin of pine-wood, healed up to

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outward appearance in the most satisfactory manner, Aithryn was observed to be never the same as before. Something took place within him; his creative force and independence oozed away, as it were, with those few drops of blood. He could still dissemble; his charm of person remained unimpaired; on the other hand, he grew to be afraid of his own judgment — grew to be weak of will, and proportionately distrustful. He did what no ruler of men should do. He began to lean on others.

The Christians had already made some progress in his realm; and up to the date of this accident he had successfully played off their pretensions against those of the druids, to his own advantage. Now, losing all initiative, he fell under the influence of the white-robed ones, and of them alone. They duly flattered him, as the Christians in their place would likewise have done; they recognized his infirmity, and contrived to give him the same advice which the Christians, had they been his favourites, would also have given him.

"Be obscure," they hinted, "and men will think you strong and wise like your fathers. You have a reputation to keep up."

It was through certain spies — of whom, like all wavering monarchs, he had a considerable supply — that he heard of the construction of

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the new town and its sea-wall on the distant continent. The idea irked him; he suddenly remembered that he would have liked to build something of the same kind himself, and mentioned the matter to his counsellors. Whatever arguments may have been employed, they agreed upon one point: that the druids must first be consulted.

"By all means," he replied. "Who would dream of acting otherwise?"

They dispatched an embassy which returned in due course, bearing a response to this effect: *Devour not salt with stones.*

"That settles it," remarked the monarch ruefully, before anybody else had time to think what the druids meant by those dark words. "That settles it! The sea is salt. The sea may not be devoured with stones, with structures of masonry. We must abandon the enterprise."

In short, he obeyed the druids, who therefore said, as the Christians would have said in their place (and actually did say, later on):

"A good man, our Aithryn."

Yet the reports of his spies made him more and more envious. In olden days, while still enjoying full health, he could never have resisted the temptation of sailing down with his fleet and attempting to destroy the new city; he could not bear the thought that this land, formerly neither

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earth nor sea, should now be converted into a rich mart and threaten to engulf what little trade his own country might do with regions East and South. Ancestral astuteness came to his aid. He thought:

"What cannot be done by force may be done by guile. The place lies low; the sea may help me. Meanwhile, I will find out things for myself. These spies are no more to be trusted than anybody else. . . ."

It was a sunny afternoon when his spacious green boat, after a two weeks' journey, came within view of that town and its embankment. Not a breath of wind was astir; the sails were furled; they skirted the dyke with mighty oars, and something drove Aithryn to say to the rowers:

"Set me down yonder ——"

at a sequestered point, namely, where a handsome gentlewoman, dressed in a flowing robe of blue, sat working at her embroidery, while a maid stood at a respectful distance behind.

It happened to be the queen herself. Being of a simple-minded, sentimental nature, she often came to this spot to enjoy the view and a little solitude after the trouble and din of the palace. Just then she was singing, as she often did, her favourite melody — an old song about a swan that came sailing on broad wings down

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from the white North, and wondering, as she often did, what the swan came for, out of those dim and distant regions.

"I wish I knew," she thought.

As Aithryn stepped on shore and moved towards her she raised her eyes gravely, puzzling who this glorious stranger might be. For he looked more like a god than a man, with ruddy lips and sparkling eyes, and curls that descended to his shoulders like the fire in the setting sun. And what charm of manner, what insinuating grace in those words of frank greeting! Soon he was telling her some untruthful tale about himself and learning, in return, who she was, which increased a thousandfold his seeming respect and admiration. He gleaned much else besides; of the town's resources, of Ormidius Limpidus and his stout impregnable masonry, of the key at the king's girdle, of their childlessness and other troubles great and small; then, having garnered all the necessary information, he added:

"Your silvery voice — it drew us to the shore from far away; we took it to be that of a mermaid! And what pretty beads you are wearing! Amber, you call it?" (He possessed 174 chests full of amber at his castle.) "How well they match that exquisite blue robe which, in its turn, tries vainly to rival your eyes in splendour. I

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never saw such eyes; are they not carved out of the sky of mid-day? You have made me love that colour. My boat, you perceive, is not blue — not yet. But soon it will be! Everything shall be blue henceforward — everything!"

The lady, unaccustomed to such bold adulation, remarked almost shyly:

"It looks a brave vessel, wave-tinted, and fashioned like a bird. Of uncommon build, I must say."

"You seafaring folks are rightly concerned about such things. Would it please you to step on board and observe more at your ease?"

"Gladly."

Such blame as attaches to this freak of boreal gallantry on the part of Aithryn should not be withheld. It appears to his credit, none the less, that instead of carrying off the lady to ransom or murdering her outright, as would have been considered legitimate by many a king of his own and subsequent periods, he merely offered her some refreshment and, after making himself uncommonly pleasant and consoling her, with many fair words and acts, for her childlessness and other troubles great and small, set her on shore again.

Then he sailed away; back into the white North.

"Now I know," thought the queen.

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For a long while she watched his vessel as it clove the water and receded from her sight, growing smaller and smaller, and rounder and rounder. "Like an apple," she fancied, and then, after a long pause, she added sentimentally: "More like a little green pea." Suddenly it shrank away. She looked at the spot where the ship had been; nothing remained but a wide watery expanse that mirrored the sunset-glow. Then she felt a void in her heart, and a kindness towards this winsome stranger. Would he ever return?

Aithryn purposed to return in due course. Like many of his race, he seldom did a good action without calculating on some ulterior profit. He had refrained from abducting the lady, "for what," he asked, "would be the use of a ransom? It will never destroy the city." Better far, he argued, to sow the seeds of discord within its very walls; to rear up for himself an ally on the spot, some Aithryn-like creature, domineering, resourceful, cruel, on whose sympathy and co-operation he could rely, when the time was ripe, after revealing himself for what he was . . .

The encounter of the queen with the handsome sea-rover was pretty generally known in the town, but nobody, not even the lady herself, spoke of the matter to the king. They thought he

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might possibly be angry, because his consort, like everybody else, had a reputation to preserve, the reputation of a loving and faithful spouse.

She lived up to it, for not very long afterwards a daughter was born at court, an event which caused boundless rejoicings among the citizens, though the royal father himself was slightly disappointed; he thought Belen might have given him a boy, while he was about it, "after keeping us waiting all these years."

"Better luck next time," said his lady, with a fond smile.

The little one was regarded as a portent, not only because she was amazingly beautiful and had never — no, not once — been known to cry, but also because her father at the time of her birth was rather an old man, being then over sixty years of age. As for the queen — it was noticed that she, from the day of that adventure onwards, loved more than ever to sit on the embankment during the afternoon, with her maid and embroidery, returning wistfully to her royal duties when the sun sank into the waves. It was her brief hour of freedom, she used to say. Here she rested, gazing upon the sea. Would he ever come again? "He promised," she often thought. "And yet, if he does, I shall faint away — I know I shall. I could never bear to look into those eyes. I have seen them since,

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every day of my life. I have touched those ruddy locks. . . ."

Grown somewhat stouter and more faded of complexion, with grey streaks in her hair, she was reposing here at that very moment, twenty years later, profiting by the gleam of sunshine after the rain, and waiting to see whether the princess would pass by on the way to her tower. She would have liked to speak to her daughter before evening, being ill at ease about the arrival of the new Christian preacher and its possible complications.

The young lady, attended by Harré, came in sight.

"Always at the same spot, mother dear! And always in blue — a tint, by the way, which I rather dislike. And always those old-fashioned amber beads! I declare you are the only person alive who still wears amber. Why not a necklace of jet or lignite? Or an iron bracelet? Or would you like some pearls of coloured glass? I think I can still find a string or two in the rubbish market."

"Amber was good enough for my generation. . . . You received my message through that painted terror, that little korigan of yours? You are coming tonight? I beg of you, dear girl, do not fail us. There is nothing I dread more than scenes; we should always avoid them,

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if only for the sake of your dear father. Eighty-three years — think of it! He is a wonderful old man. We may count on you?"

"Have you ever known me disobey my mother?"

"You are a sensible girl, as a rule. But why then, naughty child — why are you not wearing the shawl I sent? It comes from the Roof of the World. You will catch cold."

"If you only knew how warm I was, without shawls or anything else. Boiling all over, all the time."

"Oh, hush, dear!" said the queen. "Don't talk like one of those dreadful creatures down by the harbour. No princess is ever quite so hot."

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CHAPTER IV

NIGHT drew on apace. The banquet was ended; a savour of roasted meats and stews hung about, mingling with harsh breaths from the sea that invaded even the inner regions of the palace. You could hear the waves moaning, near at hand.

The guests, many-tinted and many-tongued, were discoursing of this and that; the king himself, having done his duty, sat in an interior room, a mighty tankard at his side, playing chess. It was his latest diversion. Some Oriental of renown had introduced the game at court, describing it as a royal pastime — much to the annoyance of all of them, for the monarch promptly succumbed to its fascination and insisted on their learning it and playing with him. An old man, unaccustomed to be thwarted, he was liable to grow grumpy when beaten. It was difficult to avoid that result, the only person who almost invariably succeeded in the feat being Ando, the court prophet.

Here was the princess, smiling and glittering. At her mother's urgent request, she had put in an appearance; she always gratified her par-

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ents — nearly always. The queen moved about with kindly words, trying to make everybody feel at home, which nobody ever did. It was lucky, they thought, that there was something to look forward to later in the evening — an entertainment at the tower of the princess, due to begin after the king had been safely put to bed in his own apartment. A slightly different kind of society was gathered yonder, and a slightly different atmosphere prevailed.

There was no avoiding these ceremonies. All the distinguished citizens of the place were constrained, once a week or so, to pay their respects at court, particularly on occasions like this, when unusual strangers were expected. Neighbouring princelings and chieftains, attended by one or more of their wives, were also wont to grace these halls; uncouth personages with stained limbs who boozed their liquor through huge moustaches as through a sieve; they stalked and swaggered about in spears and shields and so little else that the kindly queen often longed to lend them a few woollen garments for the evening. They could even be seen, some of the wilder of them, gnawing their meat like lions, and if there was any part they could not easily tear away, they would cut it off with a small sword which they wore in their belt for purposes such as these.

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That Greek merchant, Theophilus by name, had arrived in time for supper — a sulky-looking man with curled grey beard that ended in two points. He limped slightly, having once been wounded in the toe, he explained, during a little encounter with a dragon. Just then he was engaged, together with old Lelian, in examining a complicated old-fashioned buckler embossed with coral. Presently, replying to some question on the part of the armourer, he said:

"Theophilus? It means a friend of the All-Highest. No name could be less appropriate for me. Parents are queer folks. They seldom consult the wishes of their children." He looked sulkier than ever as he spoke.

"He is right," thought the princess who had overheard the remark and who, in her heart, had little affection for either her father or mother.

The new Christian preacher was not yet introduced. His ship had cast anchor after sunset, and it was reported that he had suffered considerably from the sea, this being his first — and, as it happened, his last — experience of ocean. It led men to talk of the Christians in general, and gave Ando an opportunity for telling a story of a horrible marine monster in a distant country, which used to creep on shore at night and devour the little children, till a Christian con-

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trived to sprinkle a few drops of his holy water on its tail, whereupon ——

Nobody was greatly interested in the event. Ando's stories were always suited to the occasion. He had been told to "keep it up" and say kind things about the Christians, in order to dispose the minds of the assembly in favour of the new arrival and forestall possible scenes. . . .

The palace was a dull place, and austere. Founded nearly forty years ago — the first structure, indeed, that rose upon the soil after the completion of the city's bulwarks and docks, and one of the few which had not been rebuilt in the interval — it was now, as the princess often complained to her father, hopelessly barbaric and out of keeping with the rest of them.

"Do let me make it habitable," she would say.

The parent, dearly as he loved his child, and almost invariably as he gave way to her wishes, would never yield to this particular whim of hers. A military man of the old school, he insisted upon the simple martial character of his dwelling.

"You have your tower to play with. Turn it into solid bronze, if you like; encrust it with onyx and topaz. You are a young woman and such triflings befit your age and sex. Now put yourself in my place. I am an old fighting man and, as some people think, not altogether an unsuc-

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cessful one. I want my palace to look warlike. The guests must overlook its little deficiencies, as you call them. Your sweet face, my child, is enough to make anybody overlook anything. Come, don't you think this style of building suitable? Ask your mother. We will abide by what she says."

"Now where is my mother?"

The queen, on such occasions, was seldom to be found.

"Only one storey!" his daughter would insist. "Full of draughts! And so sombre with those stone floors and bare walls and miserable pine torches! We can hardly see each other's faces. Tallow would be better. Or why not let me give you some casks of that tree-oil from the Massillian province which I use myself? And the banqueting hall with its uncomfortable benches, and all those skins and horns and arms and trophies. It is like a barn for buffaloes. Do let me take it in hand! It needs silken hangings and warm things underfoot and copper panels and many-coloured marbles, and silver mirrors to reflect the lights. My dwarfs could do the whole work in a few days. You would never recognize the place again."

"I dislike those dwarfs of yours. I wish they had not come here. Are you never going to send them away?"

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"Why?"

"Because — oh, I am not blaming you, dear child; far from it. Only let me tell you — let me tell you that long ago, twenty years before you were born, while we were collecting slaves for the building of this town, we happened to invade the territory of the Alloquisti, those prickly blue people who fight — well, stark naked ——"

"Quite right," interrupted the princess. "I like that spirit."

"So do I. And they fought well, I must say. No harm in praising your foe, once you have vanquished him. How we battled! And the prisoners we took! I remember — what were we saying? Yes; the dwarfs. There, among the Alloquisti, I heard queer tales about your dwarfs who used to inhabit that country. Queer tales — queer tales."

"My dear papa, I know them all."

So she did. She knew as much about the dwarfs as they knew themselves, which was a good deal more than enough for most people.

The only concession she managed to wring from him was in the matter of eating and drinking vessels. One by one, those ungainly wooden platters and goblets of horn had been replaced, in the interests of civilized guests, by delicate ware of gold or even glass. She had begun by making war on the largest of them all:

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"That Auerochs-horn! Its silver rim, I confess, is daintly wrought, but you really cannot expect a person like the Sultan of Babylonia, who sips his wine like a quail, to drink out of such a tub. The poor little man might fall into it and be drowned. And what would he then tell his people at home? He would say we were savages. Such men should take back to their country a glowing account of our wealth and hospitality. It will encourage them to trade with us. Trade will bring prosperity. And prosperity, dear papa, will bring you credit. Future ages will say you were even greater in the arts of peace than in those of war. We shall be more proud of you than ever."

The prosperity of the town signified pleasure for the young lady herself. All she sought was pleasure — a refined form of pleasure, interspersed with streaks of a more earthly tinge. So long as she attained that end, her parents could take the credit for her enlightened ideas.

"I have often said you were a sensible girl. That Urushorn and the rest of them shall be stored in the cellars. They shall: so help me, Belen. Though I am rather anxious what your mother will say about it. . . ."

Meanwhile Ando, who loved to hear his own voice, was still inflicting edifying tales upon the company. Every one knew him to be an im-

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postor; even the king knew it; nobody knew it better than himself. It was his merit, however, to prevent the conversation from flagging. He talked to excess; he ate to excess; to atone for these defects — as the princess once remarked — he also drank thrice as much as anybody else. Ando was the last of his kind. The king in former days used to have many such table-companions about him and even take them on his warlike expeditions, as other sovereigns of his race took their favourite boys and girls. One after the other they dropped out of sight. The monarch was now too old for such company. All he wanted was peace and a quiet life, and his consort was not sorry to see them go, as she could thereby effect — what she was fond of effecting — a noteworthy reduction of expenses. There had been jesters and funny men; the king declared he knew all their jokes beforehand, and that none of them were as good as his own. They went. There had been minstrels and bards, with harps and lyres of four or five strings; the king vowed that their music "set his nerves on edge," a speech which he had picked up from his daughter and which invariably made the courtiers laugh, knowing, as they did, that the old man possessed no nerves worth mentioning. They went.

"Besides," he would say, "what can these

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folks sing about? One grows tired of hearing one's own praises. I made a couple of wars and founded a city. We all knew that."

"We all knew it!"

"In other words, I did my duty like everybody else. Dozens of kings are doing the same at this very moment, or ought to be doing it. And as to music — the only music I ever really liked was the trumpet of war." Generally, on such occasions, he was wont to add, in tones of command:

"Bring hither a trumpet, straight or curved ——"

This bringing forth of the trumpet had become almost a rite at court; it signified that the sovereign had reached a certain stage in the matter of tankards. Somebody would forthwith descend into the trumpetry down below, a storeroom which contained trumpets and clarions of many shapes, hoarse or shrill, of bronze and lead and silver; and fetch up one of them.

"This," the king would say, raising the instrument to his mouth, "— this is music to make the world tremble. Let us blow a blast and see whether it sounds the same as of old, when I used to summon my enemies to the combat." Then he blew fiercely and posed the traditional question:

"Where is the enemy?"

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No enemy was ever to be seen.

"Skulking, as usual. . . ."

Now, in regard to those minstrels, his daughter seemed to be not quite so averse to hearing her own praises sung. It was observed, at all events, that several of the younger and more good-looking of them, those with pretty curls and voices like nightingales, had been summoned to her tower to perform at some midnight entertainment or other — observed, too, that they then and there developed a trick of disappearing. Nobody paid much attention. Minstrels were cheap in the land. They went.

Ando survived them all. He had carefully studied the court records; he never spoke without turning his tongue ten times round in his cheek; out of everything that happened he managed to extract a sure prophecy of the king's long life and happiness — a prophecy which had hitherto proved remarkably correct. Just then he was replying to somebody who had ventured to disparage the present age and talk of the "ripe old times," in an unusually sensible manner, saying:

"The ripe old times, my friend, are here and now ——" when the high-pitched voice of Harré was heard interrupting the fine speech with an unseemly observation about his own "ripe old nose."

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Everybody disliked this forward and troublesome child. But for the protection of the princess whom they feared, he would never have been allowed the freedom of circulating about so grave an assembly. He had now strolled in among them, after spending an hour or two in the vast kitchens, jesting with the cooks and teasing the palace maids.

Ando disliked him more than anybody else. On this occasion he said nothing, the lady herself being on the spot. Once, however, he had enjoyed a brief moment of revenge — only once when, in her abence, Harré had surreptitiously drawn away from under him the couch on which he was reclining, thereby causing the court prophet to roll in undignified fashion on the floor. Ando straightway prayed the king, officially, for protection against this "blue pest." What was to be done? It was a problem; a minor problem but a ticklish one, the blue pest being his own daughter's favourite. He looked around for his consort.

"Now where is our lady?" he enquired.

The queen, on such occasions, was seldom to be found.

Unfortunately for Harré, that arch-druidess happened to be present that day. Manthis not only never told a lie, but also feared nobody on earth.

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"We will talk to him," she said.

Manthis had small use for boys, or even men. In spite of this, she was often heard to remark:

"I make a point of talking to males as if they were reasonable beings, though perhaps it is a mistake. For they generally have a tail where their head should be, and you may talk, and talk, and talk, in fifty cases out of fifty-one, without the slightest hope of success. Creatures of impulse! It seems to me, none the less, that one should foster what little self-respect they have. May I never be accused of partiality in favour of my own sex!"

She captured Harré and received, to all her reasonable expostulation, nothing save what she expected — a succession of impudent answers. It was then that the sinewy old dame laid hands on the boy, both hands as well as her sacred and solid staff of office, and therewith gave him a terrible beating — a beating in comparison with which all those earlier ones of his childhood, among the Alloquisti, seemed to merge into nothing; a beating which hurt all the more, since he happened just then to be clad in rather light raiment.

"And now," she observed to them, "if you follow my advice, you will deprive him of food for three days. It works like magic with males, and will ensure a complete cure."

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It was observed that Harré for some time afterwards insisted upon wearing his deerskin and, oddly enough, never sat down at all, but remained standing. He was too brave to complain to his mistress who merely said:

"I have often told you, my child, to be polite to the old lady. Hearken to what I say! Man-this is a thistle. Never try to sit on thistles. Not in that costume."

The words seemed to have sunk into Harré's mind, for a few nights later, when the court prophet, well satisfied with himself and crammed with food and drink, had staggered to rest, a hideous din was heard proceeding from his chamber. They entered with torches and found him writhing on the floor in his thin sleeping garments. His bed was discovered to be full of sea-urchins which hurt, he declared, like ten thousand thistles.

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CHAPTER V

IT grew late, and the Christian preacher had not yet appeared. Many of the guests went home; others were doing their best to look cheerful, and wondering whether the princess would ever take her departure and open the evening entertainment at her own tower. She stayed on. She had promised her mother to see the business through, and she always kept such promises, when she could. No body of any particular importance was expected at her tower that night. They could wait. Besides, she was rather interested, herself, to see this Christian. Would he be young and handsome? Or disagreeably old, like that other one long ago?

The king, sitting over his chess, was slightly fuddled — slightly "military" as, for obvious reasons, they called it — but not more. He was never more than military; never save on those rare occasions when he began mixing his words together and reaching what was known as *high-water mark,* a state which invariably decided his consort to intervene and have him put to bed. The rule at every court, ancient or modern, was that nobody might get drunk before the king, and the difference between this court and others

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was that here the king, however fuddled, however military, was never drunk. It was beneath his dignity. The citizens were made to feel that they were under the rule of a man who had left his mark, as a leader in war and peace. Had he not conquered the Alloquisti and bidden the town rise out of nothing? Therefore, unlike other sovereigns, he had a reputation to keep up. And therefore everybody else was obliged to remain sober. And therefore the court, unlike other courts, was rather a dull place.

He was an ancient man, tough as an oak; pot-bellied, with hooked nose, white beard and watery blue eyes out of which he could still look with royal condescension upon the world. "It is becoming difficult," the queen once confided to Manthis, "to keep him clean. And yet, O Manthis, if you could hear him sometimes chattering at night, you would not believe your ears. He makes me feel as if I were his great-grandmother. How does it come about?"

"That is the result of a pure life," replied the druidess, adding to herself: "And now his brain waxes soft. He babbles and grows fond. So we fall into childhood once more! Cases of this kind have been known even in our own sex. Much might have been done with him, given that proper female guidance which it was never his good fortune to know!"

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"A pure life?" queried the queen. "I am disposed to think, rather, that it is the result of never having been tormented or contradicted by his spouse. I have allowed him to keep his youthful spirits."

A man who had done great things in his day! The key of the lock-gate, the visible symbol of his power — it hung at his girdle; could he not bring death to the city, even as he had brought life? Often the queen trembled to think of what might happen if some enemy should snatch it from him. She had so far kept a good eye on that key. It was one of the many preoccupations of her life. And a fine figure of a monarch, for all his years; never nobler than during that afternoon hour when, his scarlet mantle fluttering in the breeze, and followed by a comely page, he was wont to canter sedately on a black stallion along the sea-wall — there to exchange a few pleasant words (always the same) with his royal consort, who reclined in blue robe and amber beads, intent upon her needlework or glancing over the water as it mirrored the fires of sunset.

Just then the sovereign's crown was slightly aslant on his venerable head. He had challenged to a match of chess the Greek merchant Theophilus, who foolishly claimed to possess a competent knowledge of the game. The third move was barely made when, the advent of the

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Christian preacher being suddenly announced, the king suspended warlike operation for the moment. He was never too military to do his duty.

"Welcome, friend!" he said after the more formal introduction was over. "All religions are free here. Our lady will see that you lack for nothing in the matter of food and personal comfort. So you are a Christian! That is charming of you. I like the Christians, what I have seen of them. There was that predecessor of yours — a good man. He used to complain, I remember, of our few resident Christian merchants here. He called them tepid folk. But, my good friend, please to note that everything is tepid here; the air, the sea, and even the wretched mixture they put in my tankard. Fill it up again, you there! Yes; it is a luke-warmish, afternoonish sort of place, full of mists and clouds and — you will soon find out what I mean — that river of warm water flowing in upon our shores from the other side of the great ocean — everything is moist and sticky and — what were we saying? Yes; your predecessor. A good man. Alas, he perished. It is a pity he died. I wonder how he came by his end?"

"I often wondered," echoed the queen.

"We wondered very much indeed," said several voices.

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Manthis, who was standing by, also wondered — not why the missionary had died. She wondered what was the meaning of this idle talk. Manthis loathed makebelief and every other form of untruthfulness. This scene, she concluded, had been arranged beforehand without consulting her; for the benefit of the new arrival, and to avoid possible discussions. The truth was, nobody wondered in the least. They knew all about the misunderstanding between the first Christian preacher, that unreasonable old man, and his enemy Manthis.

"They say he perished in a shipwreck," replied Kenwyn, the new missionary from Ireland. "That was the report which reached our shores."

"Ay! Or perhaps he was captured by those pirates, in which case we may yet see him again. Belen grant it may be so! Those robbers — would you believe it? — they used to come slave-raiding along these very shores in the strange boats they called sea-dragons. Well, we have put an end to that scourge. You may now sail about in perfect security. Our daughter, this young lady here, has seen to that."

The preacher looked up, and encountered a glance from two green eyes, a glance that smote like lightning and seemed to pass through his veins in streaks of fire.

"She is a good girl. Never cried, even as a

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little child. She understands her duty, and helps and loves her old parents. Their sails, I think, are red, and striped with black; the sea-dragons, I mean. Piracy is now ended. We impaled the last pirate — when was it? I forget. Not very long ago. It is a pity he died! Your predecessor, I mean."

"He was so dreadfully old," whispered the princess to her mother.

"So is your dear father. Try not to forget it, my dear child," she whispered back, adding aloud: "It is a pity." One or two of the courtiers also thought it a pity. Ando thought it a great pity.

Manthis now opened her mouth to speak, without even looking at the Christian. She said:

"It is never a pity to uproot a menace."

At these portentous words the royal mother glanced around for the assistance of her child, who unfortunately had drawn aside and was deep in an argument about turquoises with somebody from Bokhara. She still cared for stones, though not so much as formerly.

"How are your dear little girls?" the queen promptly enquired of Manthis. "Ah, and this is the new babchick! A sweet child, in truth. Prettily she hangs to your side. Come hither, Babchick. Don't be afraid. Come and talk to the queen. How old is it?"

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The maiden looked terribly confused. It was her first appearance in society.

"Hold your head up, little one," said Manthis in gentle tones. "And try to answer clearly."

"Fourteen years," replied the babchick with the courage of despair, and speaking from sheer trepidation twice as loudly as was necessary. "Fourteen years and — and five moons and — eight nights. No: nine."

"What a big girl. And now tell me about your studies. Let me see. Do you know why menhirs are upright, or ought to be?"

"Because, for one thing, they are — otherwise unavailing — for their divine purpose."

The babchick ("the intermediary") was always at the side of Manthis. Wherever the druidess happened to be, there was the babchick also.

It was an admirable institution. The child was selected for her good qualities and, during a certain period of time, remained attached to the person of Manthis in public and in private. At the end of that period a new babchick was picked. It was thus, through this "intermediary," that the other children learnt something of the ways of the world. For the babchick, and she alone, had the right, and even the duty, of permanent access to that fountain of all knowledge who was surrounded, so far as the rest of

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them were concerned, by a halo of authority and mystery; the sacred character of the druidess, to say nothing of the purity of her blood, prohibiting her from conversing with her pupils save on matters of pure instruction — a fairly comprehensive term, as she understood it. She was their teacher; of the other aspects of her personality, of Manthis the high priestess and arbitrator and politician and woman of the world, the babchick, and she alone, could obtain glimpses. It was her privilege to observe mankind in the company of her mistress, to question her upon any problem — however intimate, however remote — of life or conduct or religion, and to impart to her fellow-pupils the knowledge and experience thus gained.

The system worked well. It opened their eyes and loosened their tongue. No child was admitted into the college over the age of ten, Manthis preferring them still younger; they seldom left before they were sixteen. Seeing that a great many of the more promising girls had passed in the course of time through the honorary stage of babchick, the college as a whole knew as much of the doings beyond their walls and had gained as much freedom of conversation with men and women of society as was good for young people of their age; and this, too, without incurring any of the risks attendant upon a more

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promiscuous intercourse with grown-up people. Things filtered through; even the tiniest child had some notions of what was going on, while the bigger ones were thoroughly equipped for all the contingencies of that new worldly life which lay before them, once they left the Sacred Rock.

It was considered the right thing, whenever Manthis happened to be present, to address a civil enquiry to the babchick anent the state of the tide or suchlike, to offer her some innocuous refreshment and otherwise treat her as if she were much older than she was. At one time indeed it was thought an amusing trick among the younger courtiers to go further than this — in other words, to "make the babchick blush," a trick which occasionally succeeded, for these children could not be expected to know much of the actual practice of the world. Though they learnt, in a frank and straightforward manner, many things which children of later ages were not taught at school, they learnt them, obviously, only in theory. Manthis put an end to the scandal.

Some of them were quick at picking up ideas and became pert and self-possessed in a remarkably brief space of time; others were slower. It was observed that, although the school contained some uncommonly pretty children, the

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druidess nearly always contrived to select a plain one for the mundane office of babchick. She did not like taking risks. She watched over her pupils like a lioness over her cubs, and the college inmates would have been in great request as virtuous and intelligent wives, if the citizens of the town had set a higher price than they did on those qualities. The present babchick was a snub-nosed, good-natured kind of girl; not of the kind, as they used to say, to "set fire to the sea," but truthful and willing — a girl after the mistress's own heart. The only visible difference between the babchick and the others was that she, for the time being, wore her hair plaited and not open. Hers, too, was the duty or privilege of saying what they called "grace" before meals.

While the queen was overcoming the shyness of this child by her motherly manner, Kenwyn, the new Christian preacher, a stalwart and handsome man, walked boldly up to Manthis, provoked by her ambiguous words. He knew that white robe, that oaken chaplet and ivory staff, the richly-set necklace of serpents' eggs, symbol of eternity which floated — so the fond fools vowed — against the current of the stream; that belt of steely scales. Had they not her like in Ireland also? Was not the cult even then being uprooted out of the land? For what reason had

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the saintly Gwenulf chosen him, a man of barely forty, out of many wise and reverent seniors, to preach repentance to this god-abandoned city — for what reason, save his earnestness of purpose and indomitable will? He had come here, taking his life in his hand. Kenwyn was not of the kind to shirk his duty.

She stood there, a grave personage in snowy linen, with snowy locks that drooped in curls over her rounded forehead. Her complexion was clear and rosy; her eyes looked serenely upon the world. Something untroubled lay in the aspect of the druidess — something sword-like, cleansing, unequivocal; she stood erect, for all her years. The other drew near, a figure in black; hair and short crisp beard like a raven's wing; his dusky mantle trailing to the ground.

There was no hostility in her greeting. Far from it. She must have discovered some reason to change her mind, for she soon began talking in such a kindly fashion that the Christian felt as if a veil had been lifted between them, as if blood were speaking to blood. Each found the other anxious to do right, the same kind of right; the external methods, their opposing creeds, seemed to be only the husk, the outward shell, of this strong desire. A rare sense of ease and familiarity crept over Kenwyn during those few moments. On her part, too, there was a

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complete absence of restraint. How had it come about? Why should they converse like friends? However far apart in age or sex or race, they were comrades in the spirit. Both thought only of betterment. He told of his parents in that green island far away; she listened attentively, noting with what deep respect he spoke of them. He had been a sad sinner in his youth, he said, up to the day of his sudden conversion; now he strove to reach the light. "One is always groping upward," she agreed; there was much to be amended on earth; they might have worked together to that end — she broke off, with a tinge of sorrow in her voice.

She had observed him carefully, and arrived at a favourable conclusion. He was different from that obnoxious predecessor of his; if an enemy, then an enemy not for long. For out of those yearning eyes of Kenwyn she had read his fate, his *Awenn;* this upright and well-intentioned creature was doomed, in the flower of his years. It made her sad; there was no evil in him. Christian or otherwise, such men were the best that could be expected of their blundering sex.

Kenwyn was well pleased, not only with the druidess, but with the whole atmosphere of the court, for of the town — touching shore, as he did, late at night — he had hitherto seen nothing

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save clusters of curious faces and a great blaze of light. The rude furniture of this palace, its patriarchal hospitality and the sovereign's cheery manner — they reminded him of the halls of nobles in his own land. Then he thought of the glance which the princess had given him. That glance, too, called up memories — memories of other such glances he had known in earlier and godless days; he strove to forget it.

The king, meanwhile, was in excellent good humour. He had beaten Theophilus at chess, beaten him soundly — which demonstrated that the Greek had either told a preposterous lie about his knowledge of the game, or was even more of a courtier than Ando. He now retired from the contest with well-simulated fury, vowing he would have revenge sooner or later.

"Well then," said the king, "I will give you another beating this very minute! Ah, no. Here is our Irish friend again, our preacher. We will say a few more words to him, and tell him a little something about ourselves and the city. There are certain matters he ought to know."

With becoming modesty and at considerable length he recounted, as he had often done before in military mood, some of his warlike exploits and how, lastly and best, he had driven the sea out, far away, with that huge embankment.

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"He was the toughest enemy of all of them," he concluded. "But now he moans at our gate. Hark!"

The waves were heard, beating against the stony rampart of the town.

"The old people used to say," added the queen, desirous to take her share in the conversation and make the newcomer feel thoroughly at home, "— the old people used to say, when the waves came rushing over this land, that they were the white horses of Aithryn. Simple folks! They held Aithryn to be some sea-king, or what not."

"Why, so he is," replied the preacher. "A sea-king in the North. His ancestors have made many raids on our shores. I have never seen him. A fine man, they say, with red beard and hair which he calls golden. He sails in a boat painted green and shaped like a bird."

"Sultry this evening," the queen suddenly remarked to Manthis. "Stifling! I feel somewhat faint."

"It struck me as unusually cold for the season. But perhaps these linen garments, and your draughty halls ——"

Nobody, fortunately, had observed the queen's confusion when she heard about Aithryn, not even her daughter, who was still discussing jewellery with that good-looking stranger. Now at last she knew the truth of the wonderful vis-

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itor, though she knew him not for an enemy. What if he should return?

Ando was seen to hold up his two hands, as he always did when about to make some deep pronouncement. He said:

"*Make no friend of a red-haired man!* It is one of our oldest druidical sayings. Am I not right, my good Mother Manthis?"

"You are," she replied rather snappily. "These simple speeches are worthy to be pondered. I will tell you another of them. *Truth is the eldest daughter of God.*"

This was a hit at the court-prophet, who at once retorted, hinting at the well-known abstemiousness of Manthis:

"I will tell you yet another, which is also not unworthy of note in these days when the land is full of hypocrisy and when many folks pretend to be better than they are, or need be, or even should be. *Wine mingled with water is poison.*"

"That is not a druidical saying," she replied, "though I grant it is as old as any of ours. Sad to think what drunkards our ancestors were! Sadder still to realize that their few faults are flourishing to this hour, while their many virtues have been forgotten."

The preacher continued:

"This Aithryn, they say, is a good man, but somewhat envious."

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Theophilus was the only person present who had any acquaintance with the Aithryn of flesh and blood. He said nothing of that, but merely remarked:

"The envy of good men has ever made this world a bad place to inhabit. Your good man sticks at nothing. He is a jest on the part of the gods; their only jest, and a poor one."

"That sounds delightful!" cried the king. "You must explain it to me, one of these days. And now, my Irish friend, can you play chess? Theophilus shall have his revenge afterwards."

"Midnight is past," interposed his consort, making heroic efforts to overcome her agitation. "Our honourable guest is doubtless weary after his long buffeting on that dreadful sea ——"

"Can you?" persisted the monarch. "Can you? Fill up my tankard, you there! Can you?"

"It seems to be a kind of game," replied Kenwyn, surveying the board in a bewildered fashion. "No. I have never seen it."

"Then I will teach you," said the monarch, and several of the onlookers were seen to wink at each other. "Come! This one, for instance, is called a horseman. He moves — look! like this. Oh, it is wonderful sport, and you will learn it quickly. You are a young man. As for myself, I sometimes think I began almost too

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late, though you saw the victory I gained just now, did you not? One cannot do everything. All my life, for the rest, has been a kind of chess, particularly with that Aithryn of yours out yonder. Strange that he should be a living man. We never heard him mentioned as such, and he never approached these shores. Perhaps he will, some day. Let him come! This key — I will tell you about it tomorrow. Rest assured, meanwhile, that your Aithryn is harmless; checkmated, I should say. And here is the Vizier; he moves in two ways; he has all the hard work to do; he must defend his king, you understand. And this is the Fool. . . ."

"I am glad it is over," said the queen to her daughter, when they were alone. She had recovered her composure. "The Christian seems better than the last."

"I think so too. Manthis tells me she likes him."

"How surprising! And how relieved I am, for Manthis would never say what she does not think. I was afraid at one moment of a little commotion, which would have been bad for your dear father. Be sure, my child, to take the Irishman round the town tomorrow. That Greek can look after himself; I dislike his face."

The duty of showing the sights of the place to distinguished guests often devolved upon the

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princess, who was not averse to it, provided they were neither old nor ugly.

"I don't mind," she said, after a short reflection. "He is passable."

"And say kind things to him."

"Have you ever known me say anything else?"

"Only once or twice, in all these years. You are a sensible girl, as a rule. Show him the animals. And don't forget the unicorn family. I doubt whether he has ever seen a unicorn."

"The unicorns have just had a new baby," observed the princess.

"Let us hope they are taking proper care of it this time. Young things should be warmly wrapped up, and old things too. And now try to get your father to bed. I wish that horrid game had never been invented. It makes him kick all night in his sleep."

"That is not chess, mother. That is the tankard. Too much tankard. Too military," declared the princess, who had little tolerance for failings other than her own.

"May you never have a worse husband, my child."

"I shall never have one at all."

"A caprice! I wish you would learn to think like the rest of the world. Everybody gets married sooner or later. Ask your father."

"When he is sober."

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"Do try to speak more kindly of him. Think of his white hairs! Wait till you are eighty-three! You should have heard him talking last night. Like a boy of your age."

"That is the tankard."

"Oh, hush, dear! Tankard or no, he is a wonderful old man."

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CHAPTER VI

THE mellow light of afternoon was flooding the streets. They had strolled for a time beyond the city wall to view the potteries, cucumber gardens and dwarfs' settlement; now, returned to the centre of the town, the princess was saying:

"And what think you, Kenwyn, of our harbour?"

It lay there, oval in shape. Countless craft were moored to its side, ships of every build — shallow river vessels, coast traders and others from foreign lands far away. All was bustle and confusion on that smooth expanse; rowing boats plied hither and thither, sailors were gesticulating and calling to each other in many tongues, while flocks of snowy sea-gulls hovered overhead or plunged with wild cries into the water when some piece of garbage was thrown overboard.

"I have never seen its like," replied the preacher. "How strangely shaped. Like an egg."

"True. And the streets, you see, converge here. The whole town has this shape, more or less. A Roman built it."

"The king told me yesterday that he himself ——"

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"This Roman, you understand, worked under his direction."

Not without a terrible wrench had Ormidius Limpidus departed from his own tradition of a square settlement with its four gateways. He perpetrated this outrage on his feelings, artistic and patriotic, in order to conciliate the druidess who even then, young as she was, possessed an all-powerful influence at court. He felt the need of an ally in case the king should lose his temper seriously and do him to death in a fit of impatience at the slowness of his work. Manthis, he thought, might be able to avert such a catastrophe. One day she had given him to understand, in veiled language, that she had a passionate cult of the egg-principle. The shape of the harbour, of the town, was an insidious piece of flattery on the part of the engineer who had a passionate cult of his own skin, and of his hundred female slaves.

"A Roman, you say? That explains the solidity of everything. We have heard much of the Romans."

"Solid indeed," she replied. "Our court prophet says that granite endures. He means that these walls and docks will last for all time."

"Nothing endures for ever save the All-Highest alone."

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"Really? Then Ando must be mistaken. I often tell my father that he is no longer fit for his business. He drinks too much. Only think! We have this fair mountain water, brought hither by the aqueduct you saw. I have drunk nothing else all my life. Ando refuses to touch it. He says: 'What injures my sandals cannot fail to injure my stomach.' He is also too old. Our court is full of musty, moth-eaten people. I am glad you are young and strong and altogether different from that predecessor of yours," she added with a smile. "Come! We will look at some of these warehouses."

In those immense vaulted chambers, dimly lighted, the air was heavy with the scent of spice. Sacks of foreign merchandise lay about — ostrich feathers, cinnamon, cloves, pepper, dried fruits, bitumen, gums and resins; casks of wine from Italy or the Levant; bales of cotton cloth from Turkestan, carpets, embroidered silks from distant Cathay. There were sheds full of porphyry and marble slabs of many kinds, and metals from the interior, and rare woods for inlaying. Alongside, Kenwyn noticed the taverns where sailormen gambled over their cups, some rank with saffron and garlic and assafoetida and such seasoning as Orientals love, others where Europeans could devour the fare of their own country — oysters from the neighbouring

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beds, and ducks, and hams, and red cheeses and radishes and liver sausages and savoury ragouts of game or fish. Low dancing saloons were attached thereto, brothels, adapted to every taste, steaming vapour-baths full of ribald song and laughter — haunts of debauchery.

The preacher, observing these things, shook his head.

"You should see my town by night," remarked the princess.

"I hope I never may," he replied. During this brief walk he had been growing ever more taciturn. He was unpleasantly affected with the exuberance of the place.

"Why not?" she enquired. "Are you afraid of pleasure?"

They had left the water-side and were now moving along one of those broad thoroughfares lined with the palaces of the richer merchants. These men lived in their upper stories. The lower floors were dedicated to work, and utilized as ateliers and showrooms where visitors could inspect their wares and make purchases.

"Travellers have told me," said the princess, "that there are things here such as you will find in no other Western city."

They entered several of these buildings to observe how they manipulated the leather, burning it into fair patterns and staining it to cobalt blue

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and other shades. They saw the workers in enamel, the dyers, gem-cutters and lapidaries, magicians, druggists, embroiderers, and those who blew glass into wondrous designs and colours, while the brittle mass flowed like water under their touch. A whole street was dedicated to perfumers, sickly men, contriving unguents and cosmetics with essences from many lands.

"Favourites of mine," said the princess." "They distil odours of violet or quince or myrrh or fenugreek or lilies — anything you please! Syrian roses, or from Cyprus or Campania! And here are other favourites," she went on, leading him towards the goldsmiths and jewellers who vied with one another in fashioning rings and pendants of precious metal and encrusting them with stones. Groups of Jews clustered about the pavement, discussing the market and appraising some pearl or other rarity arrived from over the sea.

"Men of the East — how they love handling gems! And to reflect that up to a few years ago this town had never seen any save our own lustreless river-pearls and jade and coral and trash of that kind! They wore beads of glass or copper armlets. My father actually forbade his people, at first, to import gold. Well, we have changed our minds since then. I also used to play with chrysolite and what not. Now my

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fancy has grown bolder. I frolic with the streets." She looked up at the structures facing them, and continued:

"If only that paint on the house fronts were not always being effaced by the moist sea air. It looks disorderly. All the year round it has to be renewed. What shall be done about it? Let us have your advice, Kenwyn."

The preacher glanced upwards, in a wondering fashion.

"I know nothing of painting," he said. "I never noticed it. Why paint the houses at all? The stone underneath would be good enough for me."

"Not for me."

The quays, the sea wall and harbour, still bore the massive imprint of Ormidius Limpidus. Otherwise not much of the original austerity of the town could be detected in its external appearance. Those grey granite walls, though they had begun to brighten themselves naturally with a sulphur-tinted lichen, were too gloomy for the princess. She had covered them with tiles or marble or plaster — plaster which was painted either in one hue or else enlivened with barbaric scenes of hunting and feasting and slaughter; all of which, to the great annoyance of the young lady, had to be repaired from time to time on account of the rain and salt sea air which gnawed

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away the colours. She had erected arches and colonnades; cheery copper, the work of the dwarfs, gleamed at the gateways and house entrances; parterres of flowers and bold shop signs diversified the roadways, and at nearly every street-corner stood a turret encased in polished brass and bearing, at night, a monstrous torch whose beams, caught by the overhanging mists, flared over the city like a lurid mantle, visible far out at sea.

"I thought much of these colonnades," she was saying, "when first they were built. Now I find them clumsy."

"You must be hard to please."

She smiled.

"Sometimes, my good Kenwyn. Only sometimes."

He wondered what she meant by those words.

It was a democratic mart, an emporium and outpost of civilization; a gaudy place inhabited by folks of the same kind — exiled rulers and generals, high-class reprobates, merchants, enriched slaves, artizans of uncommon capacity who, for some reason or other, had been obliged to leave their homes. Folks who had money to spend! They flocked hither from every part of the world, assured of the protection and encouragement of the princess. No questions were asked how he or she lived. No one was discour-

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aged from settling in this town, whose reputation for vice was such that lovers of pleasure had been known to desert even their Mediterranean capitals for the sake of the peculiar attractions which they found here. An air of good humour pervaded those thronged streets. You could see horsemen from the neighbouring hill-country, wrapped in gaily-striped plaids, lazy Orientals carried about by their slaves, women of many kinds, apparelled in flashing silks, with scarlet slippers and gilt parasols, moving freely among the rest — too freely, Kenwyn was disposed to think. And this town, he reflected, would have remained a mere unloading-place for a few dozen ships but for the initiative of the lady walking at his side, who fostered its strange growth and gave it the impress of her own mind.

An impress altogether unfamiliar to him. This thriving trade and luxury — he contrasted it with the green calm of Ireland. It was as if one of those rank and glittering tales of the East, which occasionally reached his shores, had sprung into life at this spot. There would be much ploughing and uprooting of weeds to be done here before the good seed could be sown. None the less, he was constrained to observe:

"I see no beggars."

"That is what your predecessor used to say. There are no beggars here. We send objection-

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able folk to work at the mines, or throw them into the Great Drain. We have many thousand labourers in the mines at this moment. I am still rather fond of metals, though the dwarfs, I must say, are beginning to set my nerves on edge."

Kenwyn remarked gravely:

"Those dwarfs, my lady, are unbaptized and unredeemed. They are held to be lost souls, by our Church. I wish I had never set eyes on them. If I could but persuade you to drive them back into their wilderness! And where, by the way, are your temples? I see none."

"That is what your predecessor used to say. There are no temples here. That horrid old man wished to keep us poor, in order that we might build temples and pray inside them. But our folks are not poor; they are happy. No happy man ever prays. Why should he? There is much misery, they tell me, in Rome and Byzance; and many temples. Perhaps the All-Highest creates poor men in order to be able to do something for them, since he can do nothing for the happy ones. Or perhaps they create him in order to be able to ask him for something. They seem to hang on one another; it must be an unpleasant state of affairs. . . . I, too, would like to visit Rome and Byzance. What would my old parents do without me? One must think of one's

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parents, Kenwyn. I dislike the thought of leaving them."

The princess disliked the thought of leaving her city. . . . .

Ripe and rotten, said Kenwyn to himself. It reeked of foulness; it seemed to have sprung up like a fungus in the night, ready to crumble into putrefaction. The devil might well look with an auspicious eye upon its unhealthy flowering.

"Perhaps the devil dwells here," he ventured.

"That is what your predecessor used to say. And we told him that the devil, obviously, knows what is good. I think, Kenwyn, he is not as red as he is painted, though I have never seen him. Have you? Sometimes I wish he would dwell here. He is a fine architect, they say, and there are many little things I would like to ask him," she added almost wistfully.

Once or twice already, when disappointed with her own efforts or with what she called the increasing stupidity of her assistants, she had been on the point of summoning the devil to her aid. Hitherto she had refrained. She was afraid of passing under his power and losing that sense of independence which she cherished more than all else on earth. Yet often she longed for his counsel — how often!

For she was never wholly satisfied, her passion for ornament having no fixed models. Her

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own tastes were changing all the time; changing and expanding; she forgot her earlier ideas as soon as they were executed, and straightway went on to something new and better. The results, wonderful as they were, never quite came up to expectation. Her parents, meanwhile, watched her doings in loving but anxious bewilderment, like two sparrows that have hatched a cuckoo. One side of her genial nature was so far hidden from them; they were sufficiently puzzled by what they saw of the other, and her father, more particularly, often marvelled whence she derived that imperious will, that restless longing to mould and fashion anew. He concluded that they were qualities of his own, which the incidents of a busy military life had never allowed him to develop to their full extent. For the city was her creation; its pride had grown with hers, and now there was no end to either.

All for the sake of pleasure, she told the troubled Kenwyn; pleasure that relaxes the mind; pleasure — an end in itself, and the worthiest occupation for freeborn folk. And she laughed, happy so long as she could work her will upon men and things.

Pleasure. . . . He was inclined to call it by another name. She seemed to have instincts different from those of most women.

"I remember now!" she suddenly said. "We

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have a temple here, and you shall see it. But why look into my eyes so strangely? Is there anything amiss?"

"Naught is amiss."

"Are they not to your taste?"

"They are greatly to my taste," he replied. Then he bit his lips. The words had slipped out, he knew not how. What made him utter them?

"So come," she said, and laid a warm little hand lightly on his wrist. There it remained, awhile.

She led him through one of the narrowest streets of the town into a wide, old-fashioned court-yard paved with cobbles and surrounded by tall buildings.

Here, leaning against one side of the enclosure, stood a small shed of stones, all awry.

"This is the temple; the temple of your predecessor."

"A Christian temple?"

"He begged Ormidius Limpidus to construct him a fitting place for worship. The wretch took his money for drawing up the plans and then, after talking it over with Manthis, came to the conclusion that he was too old to begin building Christian churches at his time of life. So he reared this shed with his own hands, and called it a humble beginning."

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"A humble beginning. Such it is!"

"And such it remained."

"Did he make many converts?" enquired the preacher. "Pray tell me something about him."

"Folks listened at first out of curiosity. Then they grew weary of his words and dropped off again. He told them to repent, which they could not do, seeing that they had no reason for repenting. He promised them good things after death, which they did not want, seeing that they wanted them during life. Only one low woman remained always true to his teaching. Some sailors had brought her from the provinces; she was neither young, nor fair to see, nor in particularly good health. Day after day she sat in this shed and hearkened while he discoursed, and after his death she went there for three more days, waiting for him; he had told her, she said, that he would return on the third. Perhaps she misinterpreted some part of his doctrine. As he never came again, she went home and cried awhile; then took to her old life once more, saying that it mattered little what any woman believed so long as she supported herself by honest work. You can still see her hobbling about the harbour on clear nights."

"One convert!" said Kenwyn sadly. "And how did he really come by his end?"

"I wonder! Everybody wondered. There

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was certainly a little misunderstanding. He was such a violent creature, always spitting and scratching like a wild cat. That reminds me, my good friend! You are to see the garden of the beasts. My mother asked me to show you the unicorn family, and I always obey my mother. Is it not right to obey your parents? Besides, this park is one of the sights of the town. All our visitors are taken to see it."

Kenwyn persisted:

"Tell me, as we go along, something about that misunderstanding; how it began and ended. And also about his death, if you know anything. The Pope of Rome sent us word to say, not long ago, that he had perished in a shipwreck."

"I do not think the Pope of Rome knows much of what happens here. He must be a funny old man, though I have never seen him. Have you? Does he really wear a ring in his nose, in order to dream more pleasantly?"

"I think not," said Kenwyn.

They went.

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CHAPTER VII

THE Pope of Rome knew a good deal about the town — more than he need have known, though perhaps not everything; more, at all events, than was altogether to his liking. So did he of Byzance. They never spoke of the place save in a hushed whisper; they called it "the city of the plain," or Sodom, or Gomorrah, or sometimes both; and there still exists a brief correspondence between the two regarding the desirability of dispatching a missionary to the spot in order to reclaim it from druidism and vice.

He of Byzance surmised that the good work was incumbent upon Rome. "The distance from Rome being shorter," he urged, "the task of sending a preacher would therefore be easier."

He of Rome replied that his brother-pontiff should undertake the business. "The distance from Byzance being longer," he argued, "the merit of sending a preacher would therefore be greater."

Both agreed, meanwhile, that no city could have risen to such opulence without the help of the devil, forgetful of the fact that their own

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capitals left nothing to be desired on the score of luxury. Be that as it may, they were mistaken. For the devil had hitherto taken no interest whatever in its growth, and for the simple reason that his antagonist, the Christ, had taken no interest either. Perhaps they confused his craftsmanship with that of the dwarfs who, humble mountain-folk as they were, certainly produced a few things (notably mirrors) which, in point of sheer artistry, were held by some of the simpler to be almost beyond human contriving.

In the end, neither of these sluggish, worldly dignitaries moved a finger. After a few more mutual recriminations, they agreed to leave the place "to the judgment of the All-Highest,"—a decision which was afterwards acclaimed, and justly acclaimed, as a sign of prophetic intuition on their part. For the All-Highest not only had a reputation to preserve like everybody else, but, unlike many others, a knack of invariably preserving it. . . .

Gwenulf, that saintly man who, although not an Irishman himself, was then at the head of the Irish Church — Gwenulf thought differently from these two pontiffs. He was made of spiritual stuff. Inflamed with holy zeal for the propagation of the true faith, he had already dispatched many missionaries among the heathen of the mainland; now, on hearing of the sad state

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of this town, he lost no time in sending hither that first Christian preacher of his.

He came.

Nothing would have been easier for the stranger than to have remained on friendly terms with the court, with Manthis and all the citizens of the town. It was such a jovial and democratic place; they only desired to be allowed to live in peace — peace at any price! On his arrival everybody wished him well. He was treated as a distinguished guest by the king, and although the little princess frankly confided to him that he was a great deal too old for her taste, the queen made ample amends for this childish indiscretion by smothering him in comforts and cookery. He was encouraged to come and go as he pleased and to preach to his heart's content; he might be preaching to this very hour, had he cared to follow the advice of Ando, who gave him his own mysterious and infallible recipe for behaviour at court:

"Be pleasant to everybody, and everybody will take you to be pleasant. And if you can be reasonable at the same time — why, so much the better."

He failed to be either pleasant or reasonable. Manthis, in particular, found frequent cause to complain of his bad manners, his ignorance and presumption. The druidess who had more wit

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in her little finger than he in all his skinny anatomy — better blood, better breeding, better brains — looked clean through him at their first meeting. "A dry nut," she concluded, "meatless, and easily cracked." Such he proved to be.

Manthis was seldom wrong. . . .

It was not without a knowledge of her rare capacities that the great central college in the land of the Carnutes had chosen her, years ago, to fill the important post she then occupied. From that day onward Manthis had never taken a false step. She was the repository of the lore and learning of her time, and men were sometimes disposed to call her conservative, or even reactionary, because in her quality of priestess she refused to make any alteration in the old-established ritual of druidism, any concession to the changeful tastes of the vulgar. They called her a stiff old dame.

Yet, like other stiff old dames, Manthis was not quite so convinced about things as she professed to be. "One gropes," she would often admit to herself; sometimes even adding: "perhaps one gropes in a groove." Though her inner life remained undisclosed, and though she never voiced her opinions openly, she saw that there was much to be amended in the spirit of the cult. She disliked its sanguinary practices; she was not wholly persuaded of the divine properties

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of serpents' eggs or the efficacy of lunar charms; she had good reasons to distrust the obligatory eating of raw acorns for purposes of prophecy, since the practice invariably gave her acute griping pains. Her robes, again — they were far too ornate; she would have them simpler. She thought it a mistake that laymen had hitherto been forbidden to learn science, and children taught so many verses and so little reading and writing. There was something to be amended even in the secret doctrine. In fact, she found herself in disaccord with many tenets of her faith; she had misgivings both in matters of religion and of politics, and would have introduced many innovations had it been possible. "I have no fair chance," she often said to herself. Danger was looming ahead, unless druidism could be invigorated with fresh blood, with fresh and more liberal ideas — Christian ideas or any other, provided they were what she called "wholesome." It had grown paralysed and unable to fend off the coming blow. She foresaw its decline, its possible extinction, amid the turbulent ambitions of kings and nobles. A gulf was beginning to yawn between the spiritual and worldly rulers of the race; their ideals no longer coincided as of old; they were trending apart.

Whither trending?

Towards a break-up of happy social life.

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Why trending apart?

Because woman, owing to some momentary, inexplicable and deplorable lapse of intelligence had forfeited her power for good. Such lapses should never occur again! For they gave the male an opportunity of calling to mind his old and only argument, strength of muscle. The male — the weakest of the weak, if women only knew their business! Her thoughts, on such occasions, went sadly backwards to other times, better times, when the whole race was under the domination of her own sex, when women led men into battle and rulers hearkened to the counsel of their queens. She pondered upon her official gods, Heus and Ogmius and the rest of them, newcomers all — all males! She remembered how, in olden days, the female was preponderant in religious matters, the cult of male druids being quite a recent invention; and her musings delved into dusky ages before the most ancient oaks of the forest were yet acorns, when men lived in caves, hunting the reindeer and sacrificing to that all-powerful tattooed goddess, preserver of the race. The female had ever taken a leading part. And now the world was growing masculine. The male, that necessary evil and creature of excess, moving always at the outer edge of the circle — coarse sensualist or fatuous dreamer of dreams. The male, that

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blind opinionated brute who thinks he is right, because he can hit with his fists. . . .

She glanced at the daily life which moved around her. The queen, drowsy and lackadaisical. . . . What might not a woman in her position have accomplished! What chances she had missed of imposing her will upon that doting old husband and, through him, upon the country at large! She had made nothing of those chances, wrapped up, as she was, in fond domestic concerns, in clothing, provisions, embroidery. Embroidery: a worthy occupation for high-born dames! Were there not enough men for triflings of this kind? Was there not an entire street of Oriental embroiderers in the town, all males, as was meet and proper?

She was wont to pause in her reflections, however, when she came to consider the princess. She felt more respect for that lustrous young person than she cared to show. True, the princess was somewhat too tolerant of the other sex (Manthis had begun to forget her own youth), and those notions of hers, which took shape in the adornment of the city, were alien to her own. Manthis loved not beauty, but betterment. Nevertheless, she was sometimes forced to admit, while passing through those fair streets:

"It shows what a woman can do *when she wants.*"

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Woman need only want was a favourite axiom of hers. She called it a "pleasant discovery."

Then again, that scarlet streak, that sheer love of killing — whence derived? For various legends had reached her ears; indeed, the matter was beyond all doubt. Manthis who was deeply versed, as became her rank, in the mysteries of metempsychosis and who knew that the grey interludes called death are the merest shadows, passing shadows, in the sunshine of an endless life, was apt to wonder whether the princess, during some earlier state of being, had dwelt within the painted hide of a tigress. Was that the explanation? Or was this bloodthirstiness an accessory to her fierce artistic cravings, a part and parcel of her vital force — her cold yet feverish nature? However that might be, she was disposed towards indulgence even on this point. The princess was a woman, and those sporadic mischiefs were as nothing when compared to the widespread harm done by perverse creatures of the other sex. Often, puzzling over the origin of these ferocious traits, she likened that charming young lady to Heussa, Queen of Terrors.

What could be expected, she would then ask, from parents such as hers? "The girl was not given a fair chance." Had they but followed her advice and sent her to the college, as they

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were once on the point of doing! Her youthful intelligence would then have been moulded on more wholesome lines. For the duty of Manthis as teacher was clear: to fit the coming generation of women for a more preponderating influence on human affairs. This was the base, the fundamental idea of all her instruction at that establishment which she regarded as the apple of her eye and a sacred trust: the germ of better things, the hope — the only hope — for the future.

As to Christians and their doctrines, there might be some merit in them. She understood that they worshipped a Virgin, which pointed obviously to a budding comprehension on their part. It was also not without significance, she mused, that her own faith had originally been imported from those white islands over the sea; now Christians were arriving from the same quarter. Such a change of cult, she argued, would not have taken place without good reason. Something could probably be learnt from them: something wholesome. So it came about that she met Gwenulf's first missionary — as, later on, she met Kenwyn — in a spirit of friendliest conciliation.

There was nothing to be done with that unreasonable and uncompromising old person. His ordinary sermons would have passed without

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comment. It was when he started raving about the Council of Arles and the iniquity of litholatrous practices that he began to lose the respect of the citizens, and to grow unpopular. "A violent venerable," they said, wondering what on earth it mattered whether one did, or did not, worship stones. Next he gave the king a bad shock by remarking one day:

"I have now twenty-one listeners in my congregation. I counted them this morning."

"Let me congratulate you!" replied the monarch with a smile. "That is charming of you. I am sure they are hearing much wisdom from your lips."

"It is a humble beginning. The seed is sown — all praise to Heaven. And the number now strikes me as sufficient for the object in view. Tomorrow we purpose, God willing, to hew down that damnation of abomination of desolations up yonder."

"To what do you refer, my good friend?"

"The dreadful druidical grove."

"Ho," remarked the king.

He was too astonished to say anything more for two or three minutes. Then he found sufficient breath to add:

"You would do well, I think, to disclose your project to the quite-too-chaste-and-venerable Mother Manthis."

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The druidess, having been implored by the queen to avoid friction and scenes at all cost, contrived with smooth words to calm down his iconoclastic zeal for the time being. She explained that the grove had stood there for several thousand years — it could well wait a day or so; it was thick and fairly extensive, furthermore, and would require much hewing; let him preach a little longer and gain a few more converts. She had already made up her mind about him, but never dreamt to what lengths of bad taste and injustice he would go till he told her, soon afterwards, that his Church had laid it down that woman was a necessary evil and a creature of excess, a temptation of the devil, a plague, a blight, a festering sore; and that the only good thing which ever came out of such an impure vessel, as he called it, was a male child — Christian, by preference. Manthis, whose opinion on the subject of males was fairly well known, did not even say ho! She swallowed down her wrath like a well-born lady, and heaped kindness on this grossest of insults by inviting him to visit the college (they had not yet emigrated to the Sacred Rock), in order that he might see with his own eyes whether there was anything amiss with the several dozen impure vessels there studying under her own charge and that of her teachers.

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He went, but had not a word of praise for the dear little rosy-cheeked girls, their good manners, their flawless deportment and recitation of runes — not a word. He spat on a sacred plant of vervain which stood in the garden, poked his nose into dormitories and kitchens —

"Now what may this be?" he suddenly enquired, tapping with his finger an enormous and strange-looking disc of bronze that hung in the court-yard of the school. The instrument gave forth, at that impact, an altogether unfamiliar sound — a kind of shuddering groan. "Doubtless some diabolical appliance for raising tempests, or other sorcery."

"No," said Manthis wearily. Then she set forth in a few words the history of the thing; how it came from a distant Eastern land and how she received it as a gift from the king, who had vainly tried to discover its purport. "We use it for summoning the little children to their midday meal. It shouts when smitten."

"No doubt, no doubt. It shouts when smitten and is useful for summoning the little children to their midday meal. That sounds extremely likely. It might be useful, by the way, for summoning the little devils to their midnight dances. Eh, druidess? You seem to take me for a precious fool."

"I do," said Manthis, who never told a lie.

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So he criticized and sniffed about, trying to find fault, and discovering at last nothing better to say than this:

"Sad to think that these children should be reared as Satans, though, thank God, they are only girls! I will now meet you, old wench, in a spirit of Christian reconciliation, and tell you what is to be done. We two will hold classes here on alternate days. You shall teach them to wash and comb their heathen hair, and I will endeavour to instil into their poor little minds some notions of the true God. What say you?"

Rather than submit to such a proposal, the druidess would have held her right arm in the fire till it was burnt to the stump; and then the left one. This was the last straw. There was nothing to be done with the grey-haired horror.

"That settles it," she thought.

It was observed on the same evening that Manthis had donned her girdle of pale-blue callais stones. "She means business," said the townsfolk, who had seen her do the same on various other solemn occasions.

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CHAPTER VIII

IT happened in a twinkling. The king and citizens were enchanted with the idea, and so, strangely enough, was the queen herself who, mild and compassionate as she was, had realized that there would be no peace in the realm so long as that lively source of apprehensions was allowed to flow distractedly about the country. As to the little princess — she, although only a child, had already formulated with more than common precocity certain clear-cut notions as to the kind of male she fancied, and made up her mind that there was nothing whatever to be done with old ones, Christian or otherwise. An hour's consultation among the chief notabilities of the town sufficed to draw up all the details for next day's festival.

On that blazing summer morning the procession left their homes early, on horseback, in palanquin or afoot; it would be a long march to their destination in the old druidical forest. They crossed the plain by the solid causeway which Ormidius Limpidus had constructed to run beside the stream, and not all the company could recall the days when this now fertile plain was

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nothing but a wind-swept marsh. The king, riding gravely along, thought of those times with inward satisfaction; so did many of his nobles; so did Ando. Lelian, the armourer, was not wholly satisfied. He often regretted the recent turn of events. The site of the capital, he declared, should never have been changed. Then there would be less commerce, less vice, less effeminacy.

Manthis was there. She spoke little. Attended by her babchick and by three young male druids who were sojourning in the town on a mission from the interior, she moved forwards, thinking less of the coming ceremony than of her pupils whom she would not see again till the evening.

Soon the strong scent of the sea was left behind. Chaffinches were piping in the pear trees, gaily coloured insects flashed among clusters of yellow flag-lilies and other wayside blossoms that glittered in the sunshine, and the eyes of all were gladdened by cheery patches of culture — leeks and corn and flax and hemp. Many of the humble peasantry abandoned their rude conical huts of willow or reed, or stone without plaster; they gave themselves a holiday and joined the procession, which included nearly everybody of note in the town. The queen alone refused to be present, much to the annoyance of her consort.

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"What shall I do all alone?" he had said. "Besides, it would have been such a pleasant change for you!"

"I dislike scenes. Pray let me stay at home. I have many things to do which have been overlooked of late. There is also the great supper to prepare. You will all be twice as hungry as usual."

"I observe you have taken to thwarting my wishes lately. I am not altogether pleased with you. Well, well! See that supper makes amends for your absence."

They marched without her, laughing and chatting.

One voice was heard above all their lively talk; it raved continuously. It was the voice of the victim who, confined like a beast in a wicker basket, was led forward on the back of a bullock. Gwenulf's missionary had begun to curse loudly as soon as hands were laid on his person; from that moment he had never ceased to vociferate maledictions and to call down the vengeance of the All-Highest upon the druids and their devil's work, upon the town and all it contained; his curses fell thicker and faster than flakes of wintry snow. He had now been cursing for thirteen hours, and his voice was not yet husky.

A halt was made when they reached the ruins

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of the former capital at the foot of the hills. Here they dismounted to rest and refresh themselves in the dank old square, all overgrown with docks and luscious forget-me-nots. Blue sky peered down through gaps in the walls of those dismantled buildings, out of whose doorways a tangle of sweetly scented elder and privet were thrusting their branches. The king could not help saying, as they lifted him out of the saddle:

"And here we used to live! Yonder is the council-hall! A hazel, I perceive, is growing out of its wooden floor. It makes me feel strange, and somewhat lonely. I wish the queen were here. It makes me think of things — old things. What says Ando?"

"Me too," replied the prophet. "It makes me feel strange. Strange, and somewhat thirsty."

"Me too. Thirsty."

They feasted awhile among those crumbling ivy-clad mansions. There was jollity throughout the company, and a universal sense of relief at the thought that this nuisance, this menace to the peace of mankind, was at last to be abated.

"Bring him hither," said some one, after they had eaten and drunk their fill.

The bullock was driven into their midst, with the preacher cursing furiously in his basket.

"He curses better than he preaches," observed the little princess who had once or twice slipped

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into the chapel to listen to his exhortations. "I like that spirit," she added. "It is the only thing I like about him."

Thence onward and upward through that forest where they used to lay pits for the mighty urus and to hunt the stag and boar and lynx. A few surprised woodcutters left their work and joined the company. After a long march in the hot hour of noon they reached the sacred grove. The branches of those venerable oaks and beeches and hollies were so thickly intertwined that scarce a ray of sunlight could penetrate to earth. No breeze stirred here; the leaves seemed to flutter of their own accord. They moved in single file, and a hush fell upon them all; nobody spoke; nothing was heard save the maledictory brawlings of the victim, which sounded louder than ever in this silence.

Presently they entered an open green space, surrounded by hoary trees. It was the Field of Adoration. In its centre stood the old, grey Stone of Destiny.

Manthis, the evening before, had made rather a singular speech.

"It matters little," she said, "whether he shall end by fire or water or steel; whether he receive a sword-thrust in the back, or be pierced by darts, or crucified or impaled; whether we please Teutates by thrusting his vile head in a

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pail of water, or burn him in honour of Taranis, or conciliate the all-potent Hesus by hanging that loathly carcase to a yew-tree. It matters nothing! He is no man, that I should touch him, or think of this or that regarding his fate. Never will I sully my fingers with the blood of a miscreant who attempts to tamper with the young — our hope, our only hope, of better things! Choose for yourselves. Be it something simple and appropriate, in that sacred grove which the godless one purposed to hew down."

They chose something simple and appropriate.

The victim having been strapped as comfortably as possible over the curved surface of the stone, and sprinkled with salt, one of the young druids made an aperture between his fourth and fifth rib and drew out the heart and, later on, by another incision, the liver and a few more things. In this, his maiden effort, he acquitted himself so creditably as to earn the praise of Manthis, to whom the entrails were then submitted, reeking hot, on the traditional platter of birch-wood. Standing there, austere and black (she had donned her dusky robes), with venerable curls drooping over those calm grey eyes, she poked delicately among the relics, while the onlookers waited to hear her verdict. All her humanity was laid aside. She was no longer a woman, but

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the servant of God. She had a reputation to keep up.

At last the duty was ended. And still she said nothing. The sovereign could no longer control his impatience.

"How about the omens?" he enquired, speaking for everybody.

"These entrails are not pretty," said Manthis, who never told a lie. "I see signs of woe."

"Dear me," replied the king. "How vexatious!"

Ando promptly observed that he, for his part, was not surprised; not in the least surprised. Christians were necromancers and capable of anything. They could easily twist their entrails into so foul a shape, and impart to them such a sinister hue, as to scare out of his wits anybody who might have the temerity to inspect them.

"That is his revenge," he said. "Ha, ha! He is trying to frighten us, the old witch-monger."

Many of the spectators thought otherwise. They were concerned; none more so than Lelian the armourer and his small group of old believers, to whom the word of Manthis was the word of God. A cloud of anxiety settled upon him from that day onwards. Often in later days he called to mind the scene. He remembered the last words of the Christian preacher and his proph-

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ecy of doom to the city, for he cursed almost up to the minute when the knife entered his flesh. Vengeance would come, he cried; vengeance and retribution. The devil would be driven hence. The Cross would conquer. Retribution from the sea ——

Retribution from the sea ——

Solemn and mysterious words. They were the last they understood of his speech, for its final phrases became unintelligible to them. Whether he cursed himself to exhaustion, his powers of resistance giving way from age and infirmity and allowing him no longer to bear the torture of his senses, or whatever else the cause might be, his words all at once relapsed into a tongue which nobody had ever heard and which sounded doubly fateful for that reason — some barbarous idiom he had picked up from his mother's lips, long years ago, while playing as a little boy among the hawthorn dells of Ireland. Dim stuff! It troubled them. And there was worse to come. For his maledictions were now at an end; he seemed to be appealing to them as a friend, and his anguished look melted into a smile serene as that of an infant. Perhaps he was forgiving them. That smile — it sent a shiver down the backs of the old believers and disquieted them more than all his curses. Never

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again could they drive that kindly, radiant look from their memory.

"Racy talk, whatever it may mean," observed the princess who was not much of an old believer. "If he had always preached so brightly and so feelingly, I might be a Christian by this time."

Manthis said:

"He has a reputation to keep up, my child."

"He had, good Manthis."

What remained of Gwenulf's missionary was thereafter burnt, for form's sake, in the commodious basket of willow branches.

He went.

There was an end to that misunderstanding.

The procession trudged homewards, Manthis having departed a good hour before everybody else, in order to superintend the evening classes at her college. There, when all the children had gone to bed, the babchick of the day, a quick-witted maiden who had been vastly interested in the ceremony, gave such a glowing account of the day's proceedings to her fellow-pupils that they envied her good luck. Thinking, in their childish simplicity, that a new Christian preacher might arrive at any moment from over the sea and meet with the same fate, they strove to become babchick in order not to miss the spec-

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tacle, and Manthis, for all her wisdom and insight, failed utterly to comprehend the reason for the painful attention to dress and manner, that breathless interest in music and astronomy and medicine, which the older of her girls began to display from the same moment onwards.

At court, meanwhile, a sombre atmosphere prevailed. The king, preoccupied like many of his subjects, was observed to grow proportionately fuddled as evening wore on; more fuddled, more military, than usual. It was his approved method of combating perturbation of mind and unpleasant thoughts. In fact, he was on the verge of *high-water mark* when the queen, as usual, interfered and had him put to bed. On reaching his chamber, the old man grew boyishly obstreperous, vowing he would take off nothing whatever, save his gold crown and the key of the sluice-gate which hung at his girdle.

"The key?" anxiously enquired his consort who, to set him a good example, had already composed herself to slumber. "The key you shall not take off. Certainly not! Especially after those entrails; those omens and curses. Certainly not. Now wear it, like a good man."

She meant to keep a sharper eye than ever on that key.

"Certainly not! The key is mine, my dear," he replied. "How often have I told you that

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I can do what I like with it! The stupid key, always dangling here. It shall be thrown into the Great Drain tomorrow. Perhaps then you will understand that I can do what I please. I can, and will. So help me, Belen."

"Close your eyes, old friend, and go to sleep. It is past midnight."

"Certainly not. I observe you have taken to thwarting my wishes lately. I am not altogether pleased, let me tell you. Something will have to be done about it."

"In the morning," said the queen. She pretended to be asleep. It was an expedient she had learnt to adopt, many years ago, whenever her consort was seized with one of his nocturnal talking fits. Otherwise he was liable to chatter for ever.

"In the morning. Certainly not. You should amuse me now, in the evening, after my terrible day with those entrails. Sing me a song . . . No? You women are all alike. You never entertain your husbands. You never say funny things, except when you are trying to be serious. Look at that girl of ours. Has she ever made any one laugh? Not me. Never even talks to her old father unless she wants something from him. I fear she is not a kind girl. And Manthis — what fun will you get out of Manthis? Tell me that."

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"In the morning ——"

"A crowd of moulting pelicans and puffins. Something will have to be done about it. I must change my habits. Belen alone knows why a man ever marries. No more women for me! A shipload of young sailorboys, who can frolic and laugh. . . . Ando, the old sot. Bad company for a king. Drunkards are a sorry crew."

"In the morning ——"

"Wake up. I want to be amused. The council-chamber today, all in ruins and full of green things — it was not amusing. And that preacher set my nerves on edge with his curses. I wish you had been there to help me. You never want to talk when I want to talk. I am beginning to be seriously displeased with you. Nobody loves me. The pink porpoise — how it laughed ——"

"In the morning ——"

"A funny bird. Perhaps it will come back some day, pinker than ever. It is now swimming about the water again, Belen knows where. The sea is too big, and the tide too noisy. I can hear it — bump! against the embankment. It shakes the bed each time. Suppose it came in here? I am not a pink porpoise, let me tell you. I shall dream of a flood tonight, if you ever let me go to sleep. There — bump! Something

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will have to be done about that tide. Always bump — bump —— What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Ah! I thought you were only pretending. . . ."

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CHAPTER IX

SEVERAL years elapsed ere the saintly Gwenulf heard that his preacher had perished — in a shipwreck, it was said. Filled with Christian zeal, he held this devil's town to be worthy of another effort and dispatched, after anxious deliberation, a younger and robuster man, one who could wrestle and ride and swim and fight, if needful: Kenwyn, his second missionary. Of Kenwyn's preaching capacities, of his enthusiasm and uprightness of soul, there was no doubt whatever. None the less, Gwenulf felt misgivings. He knew something of his disciple's earlier and desperate career, of his impulsive nature and how he had been reclaimed by a miracle, and only by a miracle, from his evil ways. He consoled himself by reflecting that the first flush of Kenwyn's youth was now over, that the converted sinner makes the most ardent Christian and that the dreamy, inflammable passions of Kenwyn, directed to a worthy end, would kindle the fire in others who might remain indifferent to an envoy of colder mind.

The saintly man would have been surprised to see his disciple just then, not preaching to a

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crowded congregation of heathens, but walking in friendly-wise under the trees of a garden so fairly set that it might have passed for the Garden of Eden, save for the fact that the beasts it contained were not free but enclosed, like Christian missionaries, within cages; walking from one of those cages to the other, while a strange and beautiful young lady, her hand resting lightly on his arm, told him a little something (practically nothing at all) about his predecessor's life in that God-abandoned city, and his conflict with a certain druidess, the quite-too-chaste-and-venerable Mother Manthis.

Here were peacocks, and the strangely-horned strepsichorus antelope, and sea-calves with gentle eyes, and a valiant estriche bird from the sandy wastes of Numidia. The princess remarked:

"If you ask the common folk about this unholy fowl they will say that not long ago it kicked a man over the embankment into the sea, where he was found three days afterwards, swimming somewhere beyond the Sacred Rock. I tell you this in order that you may learn not to believe everything you hear in the town. Try to recollect what I say, my friend."

She spoke with a good deal of earnestness. Maybe she was afraid lest certain legends concerning herself should come to his ears.

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The other merely observed:

"It is all strange — these animals ——"

"Am I strange, Kenwyn?"

"She seemed a kind old lady, when I spoke to her."

"Who?"

He was still thinking of Manthis, concerning whom the princess had given him to understand only this much: that she was a person of pronounced opinions, and not to be thwarted with impunity.

"The druidess," he replied.

"So she is. I agree with most of what she says; not with everything. For example, she does not think much of your sex. Neither do I. But my views are not so extreme as hers," she added, with a smile. "Rest assured, Kenwyn, that she had drunk deeply, as we say, of the waters of Entri. Beware! She is a magician. She can read the clouds, and dreams; she knows every man's *Awenn*. They say she can lay eggs."

"Is it possible?"

"A kindly dame, none the less. But something of a thistle, especially in regard to her pupils. Therefore I advise you, if you value your life, to leave those children alone. Else there will be another misunderstanding, and then ——"

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She ceased abruptly. The druidess herself stood at a few yards' distance. She had not yet observed them.

Surrounded by a group of her young people (the babchick was there), she was gazing into a grated receptacle that held a portentous baboon captured in some stony African ravine — a savage and solitary beast of furrowed cheeks, tattooed with bright colours on the wrong part of that uncouth body whose hairy arms hung limply downwards, resting on the in-turned fingers, while his eyes stared out upon the world with an air of low ferocity.

"How very like a man!" the druidess was saying, when she caught sight of the two.

She often took a dozen or so of her pupils to see the animals, as a matter of "pure instruction." She held it to be part of a liberal schooling for women to learn something about the wild creatures of the earth, in whose habits and economy there was much of practical consequence to be noted. In her quality of teacher, the druidess had fairly comprehensive ideas of what girls ought to know.

Now they greeted one another, and Manthis whispered to the princess, alluding to Harré who, as usual, was following his mistress and whom she was wont to contrast unfavourably with young persons of her own sex.

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"Keep that male of yours away from my children. The small one, I mean; that blue thing. He ought to be in the cage here, with his big brother."

It was another point on which the two ladies did not agree. The princess also knew something about males. She often thought Manthis unfair to her little boy, and unappreciative of his rare qualities. But what, after all, could the old lady know of these qualities?

The old lady knew a good deal — she knew more than she need have known, though perhaps not everything.

Her children, as a matter of fact, seemed to be far less afraid of the blue pest than of that tall, grave man with the black beard and black cloak. They had heard about him from the new babchick. He was the second Christian preacher. They kept away from him. When would he be sacrificed — and how? Roasted? Boiled? Or would he turn them all into hedgehogs before Manthis had time to utter the necessary counter-charm?

The druidess remarked:

"I want these young ones to see the Phœnix bird."

Manthis disapproved of the Phœnix, a spurred and crested prodigy, resplendent in feathers of gold, who pecked in regal fashion at his food

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amid a company of demurely coloured hens.

"Look at the Phœnix, girls, and tell me your conclusions. Reflect before you open your mouth, and speak distinctly."

"He is beautiful," said one of them, at last.

"He struts about as if the world belonged to him."

"The lady birds appear to occupy a subordinate position."

Manthis enquired:

"And what says the babchick?"

"There is something altogether wrong about him," declared the babchick.

"True. There is something wrong, we are inclined to say, about many things. When, not long ago, the sun was suddenly darkened at midday, what did we say? We said: there is something wrong about it. If, at this moment, the sea were to rush over the embankment and cover the soil on which we stand, what should we say? There is something wrong about it. That peculiar gentleman yonder with the forked beard — you see him, children? He is limping in our direction; he has been wounded in one foot; he is lame. There is something wrong about him. Yet these wrong things are ever before our eyes, if we care to use them. They are there for our enlightenment, in order to show us what ought not to be. For the rule of nature is that the

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sun shall shine by day, that the sea shall keep to its appointed boundary, and that mankind, even males, shall walk more or less straight. This Phœnix bird is noteworthy, because it is exceptional. A contrarious creature! An example not to be followed, but avoided. You grasp my meaning?"

"Oh, yes."

"All of you?"

"Yes, yes!"

The princess, repressing a smile, observed:

"Bother the Phœnix. I must see the dragon. He comes from the Mountains of the Moon," she exclaimed to Kenwyn. "A young Ethiopian chieftain gave him to me. The poor dragon! He was not well, a few days ago. Not at all well."

"Dragons," said Manthis to her girls, "have various shapes, and none are useful to mankind. There is little to be learnt from them, save by way of warning. However, let us inspect the nuisance."

He lay in his cage, at the entrance of an artificial cavern, gasping, languishing. He was ill. He suffered from the moist sea air, after the dry warmth of his native rocks. His eyes were closed.

"I fear he will die," said the princess sadly. "He has eaten nothing for many weeks. Noth-

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ing! I brought him a white chicken, and clear water, with my own hands. I brought him apricots and salad, and cakes, and cream and honey. There they lie, untasted. My poor dragon. . . ."

The preacher, who had hitherto spoken little, now turned to Manthis:

"I cannot help admiring your pupils in their cheerful red and white mantles. What bright eyes, what rosy complexions! They must lead a healthy and happy life. They remind me of the little ones in my own country. And all with open hair save the babchick, who, I perceive, wears it plaited. Doubtless a peculiar mark, for the time being?"

"As you say! It is also the babchick's privilege to pronounce what we call grace — to invoke a blessing from the Lord of Light upon our midday meal. You shall see them in their home one of these days," she went on, "and look over the college. The girls will row you across in our own boat. They all learn to row and sail. Would you care to talk to any of them?"

"I would, but for the fact that they seem to be discomposed at my presence, I know not why ——"

"No woman is ever discomposed," said Manthis drily, adding, as she looked around, "Now where is the babchick?"

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That person was discovered hiding behind one of the taller girls.

"Come, Babchick! Address a few pleasant words to our Christian friend. Listen carefully if he happens to tell you anything of note, and try to hold your head up when you speak. Now try your best, my child."

The babchick stepped forward with great boldness.

"You like dragons?" she began.

"Not much," replied the preacher. "And you?"

"Not much. We have no dragons on our island," she went on. "Only sea-gulls."

"You like sea-gulls?"

"Better than dragons."

"So do I," said the preacher. "Now why do you like them better?"

"Because, for one thing, they can lay eggs. . . ."

The others, meanwhile, were still contemplating the invalid, and throwing pebbles at him to "wake him up." At last they succeeded. Painfully he opened an eye, with a malicious leer, and closed it again.

"Look! He is winking," said one of the children who had an elder sister in the town. "He knows something. I wonder what he knows. If dragons could talk ——"

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"They would perhaps tell lady-girls to mind their own affairs," observed Manthis, who had overheard the remark.

As for the princess, she turned aside. She was suffering from one of her rare moments of melancholy. She called to mind a little episode. . . .

He had been so desperately in love, that young Ethiopian, so brave in his feather-plumes, so winsome of feature. Imprudently one day he told her of dragons in his country. Straightway she yearned for a dragon. She must needs have a dragon. She said:

"First a dragon. Then a kiss."

After twenty-three months he returned with the monster which had been enticed out of its cave with the lure of a plump negro-baby tied to a tree hard by, and then emmeshed in the folds of a mighty hunting-net; he returned, looking more attractive than before. No man had ever pleased her better — almost none. And the dragon surpassed her wildest expectations. A lordly worm! It clashed its teeth and rocked about with rage, scattering the soil in a whirlpool of dust.

How they joked and frolicked, that afternoon!

"I have kept my word," he said.

"And I shall keep mine. Such a dragon is well worth a kiss. Worth more than a kiss, I fancy ——"

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"More than a kiss is worth more than a dragon," he replied gallantly. Then he laughed outright. "I must up," he vowed, "and fetch a bigger one. This is the merest suckling. Or would you have a basilisk?"

"Stay with me," she whispered. "Stay! I love you better than a wilderness of dragons."

Late in the night Harré announced, as usual, that a stranger craved admittance to her tower. "The Ethiopian chieftain, I think."

"Inded?" she replied, as usual. "Now go to bed, Harré." And the devoted blue innocent, as usual, tripped off.

As usual — ah, well!

A good deal of water had flowed down the Great Drain since that evening; water and some other things. The Great Drain told no tales.

He went.

And now the dragon was going too. . . .

"You are wistful, my lady," said a voice at her side. "No wonder. A distempered dragon is a horrid sight. The agonies of common beasts and common men move us less than those of monsters or of gods. Great things should be exempt from pain."

It was Theophilus, the Greek merchant.

Was he a Greek, she wondered? He looked more like a Jew, a dissatisfied kind of Jew, chafing under some perpetual and incurable griev-

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ance. He seemed to have a quarrel with the universe. She remembered exchanging a few words with him on the previous evening. She also remembered noticing, then, that he was intent on Kenwyn's doings and speeches; he watched him persistently all the time, even while playing chess with the old king. And now a singular idea flitted through her brain: had he come to spy on the Christian preacher? They had arrived in the town on the same afternoon. That was odd, she thought. Here he was again, close beside Kenwyn. Why else had he come to this garden? Why else, save to spy?

"I came to this garden," continued the Greek, "because they told me it was one of the sights of the place. And so it is!"

"You like dragons?" enquired the princess politely but absentmindedly. Her heart was still in the Great Drain.

"Not when they bite my toe," replied Theophilus with a wan smile.

Laughingly she said:

"I wish I had been there. I like to see such little accidents. Did it hurt?"

The other took no notice of the question. He said:

"Now this creature, look you, would be called an unsightly brute by thoughtless men. We two, princess, are not of that undiscerning kind.

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Observe his scales — how they shine, how they flicker restlessly in green and gold and red and blue with every movement of his lungs and muscles. They look like living metal. They are only the dragon's corslet. What would a fair lady not give to have a corslet that should glister as does that leathery hide, flashing while her bosom heaves with breath; a corslet that should look like living dragon's scales and yet be only metal? I have observed much metal in this town. Nobody, it seems, can play with it so cunningly; nobody can make it sparkle; nobody can tease it into shapely grains and blow them full of rainbow tints that throb and mingle like the jewels on a butterfly's wing ——"

He seemed to "wake up," like the dragon. A new light, a look of inspiration, came into his eyes. The plain man, while uttering those few words, grew almost fair to see.

Still only half listening, she agreed:

"It would be a pretty dress."

"I happen to know the art ——"

"Let us now visit the unicorns," interrupted Manthis. "Our time is fast running out, and unicorns are unquestionably more instructive than dragons."

They moved on. The princess turned to seek Theophilus, who had contrived to hit upon one of her weak points; on reflection, she would have

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liked to hear more about this strange art of playing with metal — an art of which her dwarfs, evidently, knew nothing. The Greek was no longer to be seen. He must have withdrawn himself while Manthis was speaking.

The unicorn family dwelt on a spacious triangular enclosure of grass.

In one corner of this verdant mead, all by itself, lay the little baby, dead, with stiffened limbs; it had succumbed the night before to neglect and exposure, like the last one. In the next corner, with her back turned to it, reclined the female parent, thinking obviously of other concerns. In a third corner, with his back turned to both of them, stood the male face downwards, sulkily polishing against a stone that marvellous horn of his, which glowed like a crystal in the sunshine.

"This is what I wished you to see, children," said Manthis. "Unicorns are lonely things and notoriously scarce. Now you know the reason why. They have no sense of family life; they never take care of their offspring. They forget their parents, their children; their wives and husbands. They only think of those wonderful horns. Look at him!"

"How truly pitiful," observed the babchick.

"We are the lonely unicorns, princess," said a voice at that young person's side.

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It was Theophilus again.

"Tell me, Theophilus — tell me about those dragon's scales, and how we may be able to copy them out of such metal as the town contains. I would gladly learn your process and, if it be a secret, I will pay what price you ask. Our old armourer, Lelian ——"

"Let us talk about it, princess, on some other occasion. I must, alas, leave you this very moment, having given my word to certain friends, to meet them within an hour." He spoke in courteous tones, but with an uncommon show of decision. Bowing respectfully, he hobbled away, then and there.

The princess looked after him, amazed at his conduct. She was not accustomed to being treated after this fashion. An ungracious foreigner! "He knows what he wants," she presently concluded not without a faint trace of approval at his marked independence of spirit. "Or perhaps he dislikes the neighbourhood of Kenwyn." Now what had he meant by comparing her, and himself, to lonely unicorns? And where, by the way, had she seen his face before? For it suddenly dawned upon her that Theophilus was not wholly the stranger he appeared to be. Those weary eyes — they were familiar; had they not gazed into her own long, long ago,

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beckoning to her, as it were, from another world? Where — when?

He was gone. She forgot the incident.

"We too must depart," said Manthis, viewing the sun and measuring its distance above the horizon by means of her outstretched hand. "We must hence, or we shall miss the tide. The tide is marching to its head."

Manthis had made an exhaustice study of the tides, and taught her girls all there was to be learnt concerning them. She could tell their condition at any moment of the year. Many a time and oft she pondered upon this useless coming and going of the watery mass. It struck her as a remarkable instance of that brutal misdirected force which was exemplified throughout nature, by the male principle.

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CHAPTER X

KENWYN and his conductress were alone. Day drew to a close. Yet they lingered in that garden, loth to quit its ordered paths and flowers and strange inhabitants. On issuing at last, the princess said:

"Those animals have made me hungry. I must eat some plums, here——" pointing to a gaudy tavern hung with flags, which she entered in her free, democratic manner. The proprietor seemed to know her tastes, for a large basket of fruit was straightway set before her. She took one, and then another, and another, saying:

"I could live on such fare. Meat and wine — they are not for me. What makes men devour such things? . . . I taught these folks a good deal about plums and forced them to cultivate several new kinds on the plain yonder. The young trees of this plant were brought in their own earth from Susa; the fruit is smaller, you see, than the common kind, but far sweeter. Follow my example! Try one, or two, or three."

"Sweeter," he agreed.

"I reward the successful gardeners, and banish those that fail. It is a wonderful sys-

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tem. . . . We have now many kinds, black and red and yellow. We try to graft them on almonds. We have the Armenian plum, the best scented of all, and perdrigon and harvest and cherry plums, and those from Damascus with the large stone and little flesh. And now I hear of an Egyptian plum which ripens in winter, and whose leaves never fall off. Doubtless you know about it."

"I know nothing of such matters," said the preacher. "I wish I did," he added. He would have given much to fall in with her humour. She only laughed.

"You know nothing of painting. You know nothing of plums. Tell me, Kenwyn, what do you know?"

Now is the time, he thought, to speak of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Where was it gone, that old eloquence? Dried up; parched. He was mute; his very thoughts had strayed away and refused to be marshalled back into their order. In the fibre of her being lay something which filled him with horror. Her intelligence, which he could not but observe, was chained to the service of perverse ideals. Not an ounce of goodness — cruel, resourceful, aspiring! That mind of hers — he seemed to be looking into an abyss. Yet her form, her face . . . there rose up, before his eyes, memories of cer-

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tain moments during those unregenerate days, moments of godless felicity, of contact with the flesh. Buried moments. What if they awoke from the dead?

He could only look on, meanwhile, as she devoured the fruit with childish glee.

"How many have I eaten?"

"Twenty-five," he replied, counting the stones. "And I thirteen."

"Enough," she said. Then, as they issued once more into the street:

"That horrid old predecessor of yours — he talked too much. And you, Kenwyn — you talk too little. What are you thinking of, so gravely?"

"I was thinking — I cannot tell you my thoughts. Why do you collect those animals?"

"For fun. It was not my idea. The Sultan of Babylonia told me he had a garden like this one. It was he who gave me the notion, and laid out the grounds. I always try to discover fresh kinds of pleasure."

Fun. Fun and pleasure. . . .

He said with a desperate effort, and the words rang false even while he spoke:

"One day, princess, I would like to give you notions of another kind of pleasure. That is what I came for."

"Assuredly! Christian notions, you mean?

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If all Christians were like you, there would not be much amiss with them. And if you could tell me how to make those walls of one tint in such a manner that their colour should never fade — ah, Kenwyn, if you could tell me that, I might well become a Christian like you."

"I know nothing of colours. I can only preach," he said in an almost dejected tone.

"Then preach to me! Let me listen to your words while the sun goes down, for your voice is softer than you think. You are altogether passable, my friend. I like your black curly hair and those blue eyes, so tender and pleading. You are not like me. You are a dreamer, Kenwyn; a strong dreamer, a weak man. I am of the other kind. I never dream — hardly ever," she added, while her thoughts flitted dragonwards awhile. "Tell me, how many women have already fooled you?"

"It was a woman, my lady, who wrought a miracle and led me into the path of righteousness."

"I warrant she was ugly."

Kenwyn said nothing.

"Was she?"

"Her soul was fair."

"No doubt. . . . See!" she went on. "There is not much fun or pleasure in yonder building. It is the old girls' college. The druidess used

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to keep her school there till she realized, one day, that the air of this town and the customs of its citizens were not wholesome for growing children, and took them off to her island. A mildewy place. That Roman built it. We use it as a kind of armoury nowadays. Old times! Let us glance within."

Here, in those vaulted chambers, were stored weapons and martial ornaments of every shape, and standards picturing horse and boar and other beasts — the accoutrements of an entire army. They lay about haphazard, mouldering in the damp sea air. The bronze spears and bucklers and armlets were encrusted with bright verdigris; stacks of iron swords had melted into one another under a thick coating of rust. In the largest of these rooms, which had once been the girls' Hall of Assembly, stood an array of war-chariots, their wheels rotting from beneath them, and delicate leather-work crumbling to earth. Old times! All these military things, she declared, would never be used again. Let them rot and rust! There was no fighting done. Peace at any price was the watchword nowadays.

The preacher was troubled at this speech.

"We Irish fight," he said, "and gladly lay down our lives. There are no such cowards in our country."

"I am not surprised. You live so miserably!

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Anybody can be brave in a land like yours. It is better to suffer a thousand deaths than to endure such a state of affairs. A poor man is ever ready to die; he has nothing to lose. The coward is he who finds life worth living. There is pleasure on earth, Kenwyn. Why miss it?"

Troublesome neighbours, she continued, were compensated or set against each other. The city was rich enough for everybody. Trade was good; commerce thriving. In olden days it was fashionable and even honourable to wreck ships; to lure them on the rocks by means of false lights, and then plunder the sailormen. Such a system would soon have scared away merchants, and therefore she — that is, her father — had stopped the mischief. The corporation of the pilots could also now be relied upon. For those pilots, she said, were at first unsatisfactory; they drank too much, just as if they were ordinary men, and sometimes lost the vessels they were paid to conduct landwards, since it was a dangerous sea to navigate, the entrance to the town being full of reefs. She — her father — soon put an end to that scandal.

"Would you like to inspect the last pilot who drank too much?"

"Willingly."

"He is only a few paces from here, on the embankment. He has been there for some little

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time. . . . Observe him," she said, as they reached the spot. "I have no tolerance for drunkards."

The man had been crucified, and his whitening bones and poor relics of flesh were held to the cross by means of a chain. There he hung, facing the ocean at the harbour entrance, where every ship that sailed into that narrow sluice-gate must needs pass under his shadow.

"We have been obliged to chain him up, you see, for fear of his running away and taking to his old bad habits again. There he will stay so long as I live, an encouragement to honest traders. I know what I want — my father does. This town, Kenwyn, has a reputation to keep up. We are not Irishmen here, poverty-stricken and turbulent and ——"

"And brave."

"And brave! And passable into the bargain," she added with a smile.

Crowds of citizens moved about this embankment in the gloaming, or rested on its rampart of stone. Nobody took notice of them; it was a cosmopolitan place. The princess discerned Theophilus, the Greek merchant, reclining on a rock down below. He contrived, as she passed, to turn his back upon her. She was not surprised; "another little act of rudeness," she con-

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cluded. What did surprise her was that the man was not alone, but discoursing with three or four of her dwarfs in a playful fashion, as a father might dally with his children; they, on the other hand, seemed to be full of deep respect towards him. Were these the "certain friends" he had promised to meet? She wondered how he had made their acquaintance, and what he could possibly want with those little people who, as a rule, kept so strictly to themselves. She thought of calling down to interrupt the talk and discover its meaning. No! The Christian's company was more to her taste just then.

She forgot the incident.

At their back lay the city. Night-life was already beginning in that cup-shaped hollow. Torches blazed into the sky, and a confused murmur of song and merriment rose up from the streets. The reek of taverns mingled with a harsh odour of slime and sea-wrack left uncovered by the out-gone tide.

It was an hour of calm, of happy oblivion. Kenwyn, the dreamer, succumbed to its witchery. His bitter reflections concerning the princess had faded away for the moment; he thought only of her beauty. They were friends, it seemed; drawn towards each other, and maybe never to be parted — their hearts were striving

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to merge together. Often, later on, he recalled with a pang that brief spell of untroubled sweetness which he would fain have held fast for ever.

"Pleasant here," she said.

"Pleasant."

They looked seaward, where gleams of light still flickered about the firmament. Before them, dappled with stranded fishing boats, lay an expanse of ooze and mud; it shone like molten ore. The ocean beyond was flecked with islets of many shapes, some of them mere fragments of rock submerged daily under the inrushing element; others so spacious that families of humble folk dwelt on them all the year round, herding cattle and sheep on their grassy slopes. She pointed out the Sacred Rock of Manthis, partly hidden by another island which lay in the foreground. A poor sterile place, she said, with a small lake and pasturage for a few cows. The druidess and her girls had done wonders in making it habitable. The college itself lay secluded in a stony vale ——

"But from that corner of her domain Manthis can always see the city. It is where her garden lies, and where she loves to rest on her favourite seat overlooking the sea. Perhaps she is watching us now."

"She could never see so far."

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"Who knows? And why are the beacons not lighted?" A cloud settled on her face. Lights were kindled on two of those outer rocks, she explained, for the security of traders. "They ought to be aflame at this hour. What are those men about?"

While she yet spoke, an angry red fire broke out far away; it seemed to leap from the water. The second one followed.

"Commerce is safe," she said. "All is well."

"Strange," remarked the preacher, "that this sea, now so distant, will be back again in a short while, gnawing at your foundations. You must have a sense, here, of ever-present menace. There is no escaping from the sea."

"It does not trouble me greatly. Look!" she exclaimed. "I perceive a little boat with white sails, ever so far off. It is making for the north. Do you see it, out yonder? Not our build. Some coasting vessel, if I am not mistaken."

The princess was mistaken.

The boat which left with the out-going tide bore homewards one of Aithryn's numerous spies who had lived in the city for a month or more, garnering information. He was now returning to his master with queer tales about the town and about the doings of a certain young lady in regard to whom Aithryn — nineteen years older,

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now, than when he himself set foot on that embankment — had begun to feel a kind of paternal tenderness and anxiety.

Queer tales. . . .

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PART II

CHAPTER XI

SO wonderful a rainbow, they all declared, had never yet been seen.

It hung over the city in the tepid sky, among low and luminous mists, drenching all things in a halo of beauty. There it hovered, and its splendour refused to wane. The place was glorified, transfigured. Men came forth from their houses to view the marvel; business was at a standstill; groups of children were laughing and dancing in its radiance. Had it come to stay?

"Now I know," thought the princess as, huddled in a thick cloak, she walked unattended to the workshop of Lelian the armourer. "Now I know! This is how my town should look. This rainbow is my dream. If it would only last for ever!"

The old man was standing at his house-entrance gazing, like all the rest, at the spectacle overhead.

"The mask, Lelian. And greeting."

"It is finished, my lady, according to your in-

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structions. A somewhat ghastly contrivance."

"Let me see ——"

She was tired of poisons.

Tired, just then, of everything; and filled with an unwonted sense of trouble and insecurity. She felt herself driven fatefully along, she knew not whither. She had lately seen much of Kenwyn, whose earnest but incoherent phrases had touched her heart, if not her head. They made her look within. Then she looked without again. This fair city, her creation: would she ever be able to complete the task she set herself? Never had she desired so ardently to impress her own imaginings upon it, and never felt more helpless, unbefriended, almost menaced.

Tales were rife, queer tales; she had known it for long. Men wondered how he, and he, had met his end. They spoke in whispers of her tower and of what happened there in the murky light of dawn, when sea-swallows begin to skim and circle over the waves. They fabled of a black cavalier, her ghostly attendant, who threw the bodies of the victims into some foaming whirlpool near at hand; or bore them further afield into a dank forest region, where a brown streamlet dashes itself to spray and glides sullenly into the depths of the earth, amid royal ferns and boulders hoary with moss. The wailings of these poor folk, they vowed, could still be heard.

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Queer tales! She gleaned them herself from the lips of revellers at her tower when, overcome with wine, they poured into her ears the chatter of the town. She used to think:

"That shows what men will believe. Is there not the Great Drain, that masterpiece of engineering, which tells no tales?"

She cared little about gossip, though latterly — ever since the death of Ormidius Limpidus — she had grown more wary.

For the Roman likewise vanished mysteriously, and his occultation caused more than the common amount of scandal. It was not that this was the first and unique case of an elderly man disappearing — a man indeed well stricken in years; the engineer happened to be a citizen, and a person of renown. She had laughed, at the time. She was glad to be rid of that tiresome old woman-lover. He was in her way. True, she learnt a good deal from his teaching; she made him toil outrageously to satisfy her whims. He used to say: "You are a nail in my coffin, for all your sweet eyes." But his work was done. She had exhausted or outgrown his learning, and developed tastes of her own; this Roman, she decided, had his limitations like everybody else. Moreover, he knew too much. Had he not helped to build her residence? Did he not know its secret? And always interfering! A wave of

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indignant rage swept over her when, one day, he actually presumed to override her opinion in the matter of a certain cornice which she had designed for her tower, and otherwise to treat her as if she were an ignorant child. It was a complete misunderstanding.

"It should be thus, my fascinating young lady; thus, and not otherwise. I have built more cornices than you will ever live to see. Long years before you were born, I studied Licinius on stucco-decoration, and Jupiter only knows how many more of them, and got them all by heart. Yes, yes! Permit me, an old man and a friend of your venerated father's — permit me to observe that your notions are often in hopeless disaccord with the principles of true art. There is a curiously barbaric strain — well no matter. So much is certain: you have still something to learn. Yes, yes! Even now there is room for improvement inside that pretty little head of yours."

She thought: Yes, yes! Much to learn! We must learn, first and foremost, whether there be room for an engineer inside that pretty little masterpiece of his. You are easily caught, my friend. Yes, yes.

Late in the night Harré announced, as usual that a stranger craved admittance to her tower. "The Roman architect, I think."

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"Indeed?" she said, as usual. "Now go to bed, Harré." And the devoted blue innocent, as usual, tripped off.

As usual — ah, well!

He went.

There was an end to that misunderstanding.

And yet the cornice, her cornice — the wretched contrivance never looked well. It was an unsatisfactory ornament to the tower façade; something was wrong with its proportions. Who would now help her?

The dwarfs? They were useless for stonework, useless for painting or inlaying or modelling in plaster, or for anything except metals; and it seemed as if from them, too, she had learnt all there was to learn.

Kenwyn, her new friend! His gentle but ardent figure arose before her mind's eye — what did he know of such things? Could he design a cornice? Had he not spoken with frank disapproval of her worldly notions of beauty and gone so far as to declare that this city should be razed to the ground, telling her, at the same time, of another kind of beauty and another city, all paved with gold and jasper; a pleasant place, maybe, but rather far away?

Meanwhile, as these thoughts and memories flitted through her brain, the princess was carefully testing the mask. Satisfied with its

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mechanism, she placed it beneath her mantle.

Who would be the first, she wondered?

"Kenwyn, the Christian preacher——" she began.

The armourer looked up. He too had been lost in a brief reverie. Ever since the death of that first Christian missionary he had grown thoughtful, and even fearful, for he belonged to the school of those who believe in omens and entrails. He remembered that preacher's last moments; his divinely radiant glance and those dim words about retribution from the sea. Like certain other citizens, he saw danger looming ahead — a watery danger which he connected, vaguely, with the personality of the charming young lady at his side. Her presence made him feel uneasy, nowadays. She said:

"Kenwyn, the Christian preacher, declares the rainbow to have been set in the sky by the All-Highest as a sign that there shall be no more floods on earth."

"Perhaps you misinterpret some part of his doctrine."

"So Kenwyn says. Our town, then, is safe from the sea."

"Likely enough. And the first one, that frantic ancient, prophesied it should be swept away. These Christians will fetch anything you please out of their holy books. They are not to

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be taken seriously. Let the good Mother Manthis convince your Kenwyn as she did the last."

"Always the same, Lelian!"

"Always the same. Adore the gods, be brave, and do no harm. What more do you want?"

"What more? If you knew Lelian, how much more I wanted, not for myself, but only for this city! I want the blue of Heaven and glittering stars to play with, and all the silvery beams of moonlight. Have you no eyes, man, to see how much there is still amiss?"

"Your Christian, I take it, will promise to supply these things."

"You are unfair to him. He has a kindly face, and means well."

"Foolish men, my lady, always mean well. As to his face, I have not yet beheld it. But another stranger came here yesterday, a Greek merchant with whom I once had a few words at the palace. He wished to inspect these old weapons of mine. He sat on this bench and talked awhile. A lame man, and ugly; but shrewd ——"

"And impolite," added the princess, who recognized Theophilus from this description. She had almost forgotten his existence, not having met him since that day at the dragon's den. Now she said:

"I thought he had left the town. Did he

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speak about the art of shattering metal into fine flakes and filling them with colour like a butterfly's wing?"

"Not a word of that."

"Not a word?"

"Not a word. But he told me many things I had never heard before, even about my own work. And he knows much of our old customs and beliefs; he spoke of mankind, of liberty and of light, those three primordial existences, and when he came to explain what was truly meant by that word *light* — why then, princess, I thought I was listening to the wisest of our druids. It was light indeed! I have not heard such good talk for many long days. And of other matters too. This ancient ax of stone which I dug myself out of the earth: he said it was made not here, but in the mountains of Rhætia far away. And those swords, those bent swords which we find in tombs, he said . . . all this, my lady, is of no account to you."

The princess in truth had small use for rusty blades, though she would doubtless have been interested in the original processes of their manufacture. Wishful to please the old man, she observed:

"Tell me about them, Lelian. What did he say?"

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"Men used to believe that those swords were bent double in the fight by reason of their bad composition. In this I always thought they were wrong, since our ancestors were crafty folks; be sure they understood the art of forging and tempering blades as well as any one who now lives. And that is what the Greek told me. He said that such weapons had not been damaged in the battle at all, but purposely bent, as a kind of farewell rite, and then reverently laid in the tomb beside that dead warrior whose hand should wield them no more. Some of those swords, he told me, were even made of two kinds of iron cunningly welded together; the central part of sinewy material, and the edge itself of softer but more trenchant stuff, which was then beaten sharp as a razor and could be hammered straight again after every fight. I always thought so! They knew, the old ones — they knew! And these arrow-heads, he declared, were doubtless once tipped with limeum or white hellebore. A poor concoction, he called it. Even trychnon would be better, and it grew everywhere! He thought a clever young lady like the princess might invent some really potent poison, if we people ever came to fighting again. It does not look much like it," he added regretfully.

Poison. . . . What did this Greek know?

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"Strange!" she now said. "I have seen that man's face before. I must have dreamt about him long ago, when I was a little child."

"It is not a handsome face, my lady. I would like you to have fairer visions at night."

"I often dream ugly things," she replied, and her face grew slightly harder. "Tell me more, Lelian. Tell me exactly, from beginning to end."

The old man scratched his grey hairs thoughtfully.

"Let me see. . . . We talked about the city. He said it was full of incongruous notions picked up here and there. All colour, no shape. More strange than beautiful. A gay place, but somewhat disordered and with a curious barbaric strain running through it. A lack of reverence, he said. As to the dwarfs — they had done wonders. And so they have, my lady! Those mirrors, especially, they sometimes make me feel almost afraid, as if ——"

"Bother the mirrors. What more?"

"He spoke of those walls tinted in one shade, which was always being effaced by the sea air; they looked unsightly. He thought a clever young lady like the princess ——"

"Well?"

"Might have hit upon the method of mixing the paint with the plaster ere it is laid on. It would then last as long as the plaster itself. A

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costly plan, he said, but no lover of beauty heeds the price. Those were his words. No lover of beauty heeds the price. See! That wondrous rainbow has melted away."

"Let it melt!" she exclaimed in an access of delight. "What do we want with rainbows, now that my colours will endure? He is right, Lelian. To think that all these years I have racked my brain, and never discovered that simple device. If only I could now hold fast those painted figures of men on horseback and other scenes!"

"Ay, a shrewd man. He seems to have travelled far and wide. I could not help laughing when he said you ought to have been born a boy."

"He is right. Many a time have I said the same. And what think you, Lelian? Ought I to be what I am?"

The armourer hesitated awhile. He was at a loss how to answer this straightforward and embarrassing question. Finally he remarked:

"We have heard, ere now, of wilful girls, and masterful ones ——"

"I masterful? That may be because I have not yet found my master."

Nor ever will, thought the old man; adding aloud:

"You have been too masterful, my lady,

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with those dwarfs. Forgive my frankness! The head-man came to see me two or three days ago. He is poorly. I conjecture you have been overworking him. They are frail, delicate folk."

It was true. Whoever came in contact with the princess and could be turned to account was sure to pay the price sooner or later. She made them do things for her. She made them toil and moil. Ever dissatisfied with results, ever yearning for new forms of artistic beauty, she had a gift of wearing her subordinates "to the bone," as they said.

"Poorly," she echoed. "I know."

"Worse than poorly. His wits seem to have given way under the strain. He cackled and squeaked about a screw, a screw in his head. 'Fix it tighter, Lelian. You are the king's armourer. You do these things. It rattles and rattles and rattles and rattles. Not a word of this! Fix it fast, that I may do my work. We have a reputation to keep up, and I would not let the princess blame me. Fix it, fix it, fix it, fix it——'"

"I have often heard him babbling about that screw. What does he mean?"

"Belen alone knows what he means. A nervous little fellow, my lady, and easily dislocated. I fear he is done for. How will you proceed with the rest of them? For they are useless

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without him. He has the brains of the whole tribe."

"He had, good Lelian."

Mountain folk! She was not satisfied with their latest efforts. Her aspirations had outgrown their talents. Their ideas were small, like their bodies. She was tired of their metal-tricks, even as, long before, she grew tired of the stone-tricks of Ormidius Limpidus. She was more in the mood for painting. . . .

And now the head-man had gone daft.

"That settles it," she thought, as she rose to depart. "I disapprove of them. Kenwyn disapproves of them. And so, by the way, does my dear papa. Bother those dwarfs! They must go."

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CHAPTER XII

YET how glad she had been when they suddenly appeared in the town, dropped from the clouds, or sent hither by some kindly god who took pity on her state at the very moment when that troublesome old engineer was beginning to grow not only useless, but positively intolerable. So they came, and replenished her mind with fresh ideas. And now she had exhausted the dwarfs, even as she exhausted the Roman. Who would be the next helper? When would he arrive? And from what quarter of the sky?

For the dwarfs had come from far, far away. They used to live in the territory of the remote Alloquisti. There, amid a region of cold standing stones, they dwelt and suffered, having been hunted out of their earlier homesteads by some heartless Christian bishop who, because they worked in metal, called them Teuz and Poulpikans and Associates of the Evil One, and forbade his flock to have any intercourse with them. Among those blue savages they lived miserably, having little work to do. It was long since they had danced or sung. They were fast unlearning

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their old arts and accomplishments. "We are running to seed, like thistles of last autumn," they said among each other. Some of the meeker ones sat at home, and cried their eyes out.

Every full moon they used to hold a General Council on the summit of one of those grisly dolmen that strewed the sad landscape. It was on the last of these occasions, when they had just taken their seats to discuss the question: "How life is to be endured any longer," that they suddenly started to their feet again, with shrieks of pain and anguish. The rock was discovered to be burning hot. Their little backs were badly scorched.

"Oh, wicked world!" they cried; "that settles it"— and forthwith departed moodily in search of some happier abode. Chance took them, after long and weary wanderings, to the neighbourhood of this town, where the princess, ever alert and anxious to pick up new notions, soon heard of their arrival and summoned the head-man to her presence. He was a bright fellow. He told of their peculiar aptitudes— told her, in fact, the whole story from beginning to end, not omitting that incident of the burnt dolmen. It hurt very much, he said.

"And who scorched your little backs?" she enquired compassionately.

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"A horrid boy. . . ."

It was the blue pest.

This naked young savage knew all about the dwarfs and their evening assemblies every month, for he used to herd his father's pigs at the same spot, among the same circles and avenues of upright boulders. Dull work, guarding those stolid, grunting beasts; but Harré was still too small to be entrusted with the goad for cattle. With the pigs he remained, and received from his parents more beating than bread — that being the local method of rearing children. And one day of full moon, when the little lad was more than usually bored with singing and whistling, and making daisy-chains and catching frogs and throwing stones at the yellow-hammers, he bethought him of something new. He covered the dwarfs' dolmen with many handfuls of dry bracken and gorse, and then set fire to them. The mass blazed lustily while he heaped on more and more. Just before summoning his pigs to their homeward march with his leaden trumpet, he carefully brushed away every trace of ashes. The rock was bare as before; bare and burning hot. Laughing, he thought:

"I wonder what those people will do when they come to sit down. They will perhaps get up again. . . ."

"We believe he did it for fun," added the head-

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man bitterly. "Some boys have dreadful notions of fun."

The princess liked such notions of fun; they coincided with her own. It struck her that a lively child of this kind, a foreigner to the town, might be of use for certain purposes of her own.

"Catch him for me," she said. "Catch him, and bring him hither. Then I will take your whole tribe into my service."

The head-man vowed he remembered the tracks and straightway volunteered to fetch Harré, bearing, in exchange for him, a couple of rosy sea-shells (the Alloquisti were inland folks). The bargain was concluded in due course, and Harré departed in the dwarf's company with a cask of blue paint, his only luggage, slung over his shoulder. "Don't forget your clothes, my little man," his mother said gravely, handing him the preparation. "Never deny your race among strangers. You have now a reputation to keep up." For two and a half moons they tramped over hills and bogs and finally arrived at the king's palace where, amid that crowd of courtiers and noble dames, Harré lost no time in living up to the parental standard and displaying the Alloquistian blood that flowed in his veins. He treated them like dirt, glaring ferociously at everybody from the old monarch downwards; he bit and scratched like a demon when

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they tried to make him change his native costume into something more appropriate to the surroundings.

"Let him be," said the princess. "I like that spirit, though I wish they had dyed him some other tint."

This is how the blue pest came to enter her service, and his devotion was soon made manifest. He was now far from home; she was his protectress, his only real friend among all those other people. He followed and obeyed. And the princess, whose knowledge of human nature was remarkable for one of her tender years, quickly learnt to appreciate his merits. His very forwardness recommended him; he was not of the thoughtful or reserved kind; no girl, she reflected, would have been quite so simple of heart, so incurious. All too soon, she knew, she would have to find another Harré. It was one of many little troubles at this period.

Meanwhile, good had come of evil. The tragedy of the scorched dolmen proved a blessing in disguise, for it would be hard to say which of the three was made happiest by this new state of affairs — whether the princess, the dwarfs, or the Alloquistian stranger. The lady was enraptured with all the things she learnt from those crafty wanderers; the whole town, she declared, would have to be built anew and en-

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crusted with shimmering metal. Harré blossomed like a flower under her kindly treatment, he grew plump and pretty, and his eyes laughed more mischievously than ever; as to the dwarfs, they too, at first, grew plump. At first they lost that scared and harassed look. They were quite blissful, at first — blissful as in the olden days before that meddlesome Christian had poked his nose into their concerns and driven them out of their pleasant haunts of long ago.

They could work once more at their beloved metals and call to mind a thousand half-forgotten artifices, teaching the princess, among other things, a wondrous method of coating copper with lead so as to make it look exactly like silver —a method discovered by one of their forefathers, and kept a secret ever since his day. Their hammerings and rivetings and furbishings could be heard at all hours by those who walked abroad in the fields beyond the Eastern Gate where under a grove of moist apple trees, the young lady had set apart a piece of ground for their village. Here they lived, cheery, contented, ever industrious. They liked nothing better than work — they called it "play," and their gratitude to the benefactress seemed to know no bounds. A singular little people, who did everything differently from other folks. They kept to themselves, with incomprehensible

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rites of their own; nothing definite was known about their food or habits save that they danced and sung and worked in relays, and that, on certain festivals, they chanted a squeaky hymn to their god, the Great Woodlouse, amid sacrifices of mushrooms and gold dust.

"Let them worship whom they please," said the king, when this piece of news was brought to him, "although I confess I am not altogether satisfied with them in other respects. Meanwhile, let them worship whom they please! What have I often said? All religions are free here. I see no harm in a woodlouse. What says Ando?"

"No harm whatever," rejoined the prophet. "A woodlouse is an inoffensive and unimportant worm, as every god should be. The worship of small things, and of beasts, has the sanctity of immemorial custom. There is the god Gwion, a mere dwarf; there is the pig-god Moccos and the bear-god Artaios or Malunos; the goddess Badb will sometimes take the form of a crow; there is a rat-god, the horse-goddess Epona and a worm-god and the scaly Tarask and Boulianus and ——"

"Enough, Ando, enough! Have pity on my old ears. We know you have studied the records."

"I have," said Ando.

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Soon the city, and the lady's tower more especially, began to put on a fresh face. It shone, it glittered. Like Ormidius Limpidus of old, the dwarfs in their turn wrought miracles. They knew their business. They rose to the occasion. They performed wonders. They surpassed themselves.

The princess might well have been pleased with this glowing creation, the fruit of their labours. So she was; pleased, not satisfied; never quite satisfied. She wanted more things, different things, new things. Hardly was one piece of work completed before she felt inclined to discard it. Nothing was ever quite up to the standard of how it should be; each effort of the dwarfs contained the germ of some conception hitherto unrevealed, and bore a crop of fresh projects, which she pressed them to realize without delay. "I am learning all the time," she joyfully confessed to herself, while her executants tried in vain to keep pace with her commands and imaginative energy. Labouring thus, like slaves, they began to grow weak and emaciated once more. They lost appetite; they complained of headache; that old hunted look came back into their eyes. She was working the sensitive and grateful little fellows to the bone. Yet they toiled on day and night. Some of the more conscientious ones actually pined away

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from worry and long hours; they died, and it was rather fortunate that no one, save the princess, found out what the others did to the bodies of these, their dead companions.

The head-man in particular, on whom devolved full responsibility of everything, waxed almost unrecognizable. That bright manner was gone; those elf-locks of brown hair turned to white in the course of a single month. His features grew pale and peaky; he took to wearing a cool rhubarb-leaf on the back of his person, and contracted a kind of nervous twitch that pulled one side of his face all awry when he talked.

"Never sleep nowadays," he declared in reply to the friendly enquiries of the princess. "Ouch! My head. Always thinking things. Mirrors and mirrors and mirrors. Ouch! Are they going to make me sit on a hot stone?"

Then began that nonsense about the screw. And all the while, he never gave way or even complained, zealous only to please his benefactress.

The benefactress, after she left old Lelian on that morning and had climbed to the uppermost storey of her tower to admire the view — she loved to contemplate her work — the benefactress happened to feel less pleased with the dwarfs than she had ever yet felt. Unambitious, unresourceful! Everlastingly repeating the

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same familiar patterns! Devoid of all daring and originality! They had their limitations, plainly, like the Roman; like everybody else. And now little Yuxo had gone crazy. Who cared! There was nothing more to be learnt from that tribe. Their work was done. They must go.

Yet she needed counsel and help — at that moment, she thought, more than ever. Who would now impregnate her with fresh ideas and nourish her imagination? Where would she find the inspirer? When would he arrive? And from what quarter of the sky?

She looked down upon the many-tinted city at her feet, splashed with the recent shower and throbbing in the light of noon. How much remained to be done! How full of flaws and unripe caprices! The place was barely sketched out.

Not for the first time a loneliness and despondency crept over her — the loneliness of a creative mind that looks around vainly for sympathy and encouragement. It weighed upon her. She was unbefriended in regard to those strivings which were dearest to her. She saw herself surrounded by creatures that knew nothing of her nature — mean, ignoble, unenlightened and indifferent folks. They ate and drank. They crawled about. They lived; they died.

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They infested the earth and befouled it with their coarse lives, following their impulses, their "hearts." All heart, no brain. How live without brain? She wanted a world to herself, to play with. . . . And everybody wrong! What rapture to be in contact with some one who understood what she endured and desired, and whose judgment she could respect; some one who was not wrong, but right.

"I suffer more," she mused despairingly, "than one who has lost a limb, or a parent. Who would believe it? They suffer, maybe, about other things. If so, they comprehend at least each other's joys and griefs. No one comprehends mine." And she felt an ache within her, that old familiar ache at the back of her forehead which assailed her in times of mental anguish — something that strove to break loose.

More than once, on such occasions, had she thought of summoning the devil to her aid. Nothing was easier: what the princess did not know about incantations was not worth knowing. Hitherto she refrained, for an all-sufficient reason. You could abolish your other friends and helpers; the devil had a trick of remaining. He chained you to himself and turned you into a slave. He came to stay. He laughed at poisons and Great Drains.

There was one thing which the princess

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dreaded more than all else on earth — to lose her sovereign spell. Never would she forfeit that sense of dominion; none should wrest it from her. She would be a law unto herself; independent of all men; self-possessed and self-contained. She would rule, even over parents and lovers. Such was the law of her nature. It explained traits trivial and otherwise — her childish horror, for example, of succumbing to the gentle persuasion of wine, or those blacker mysteries which the vaulted cellars of her tower might have revealed. Manthis the druidess was therefore groping in a groove, and judging other women by herself, when she compared the young lady to Heussa, Queen of Terrors. For Manthis knew no fear. The princess did. She feared to lose her sway; to succumb to the influence of this one, or that one. It was fear, craven fear, that turned her into a tigress. None should encroach upon her will — not even the dearest of friends! For lovers were likely to gain influence, to wax presumptuous or menacing. They must go. They went. A reluctance, a kind of wistfulness, would sometimes invade her mind on such occasions . . . the thing must be done. Kisses, and the raptures of the flesh — they were sweet. Passion was sweet, and power sweeter.

Never had the temptation been strong as then. She was on the verge of yielding in sight of those

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houses and streets that displayed so much untutored taste, so much that was amiss and no longer to her liking. The devil, she thought, would soon put that right!

"No," she decided. "I will stumble forwards alone and be slave to none. The devil, if he is worth anything, will know of my plight and appear of his own accord. Never shall I summon him. A wise devil comes without being called."

It pleased her, that last thought. It made her smile. Curiously assuaged in mind, she descended to the lower storey of her tower to rest awhile. Later on, she would go to the palace to inform the king of her decision to dismiss the dwarfs. It would make the old man happy, for he misliked those little people — Belen alone knew why.

She was a good girl. She gratified her parents whenever she could.

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CHAPTER XIII

ISSUING heedlessly out of that gateway of ruddy copper, she almost collided with one of several persons who were taking the air on the embankment. It was the lame Theophilus. He drew back a pace and saluted her solemnly, without proffering a word. He looked gloomier than ever.

"You are sad, Theophilus," she remarked, in that charmingly impulsive manner of hers.

He glanced at her in a forlorn fashion, and said:

"No wonder. I have just seen a sight which would draw tears from a dead buffalo."

"What may it be?"

"Yonder cornice. A scandalous production. It has spoilt my dinner for me."

Her own cornice! She was all the more nettled at these words, as she divined them to be true.

"You think so?" she enquired, not without a tinge of malice in her voice. "Maybe you can devise something better?"

"It would be difficult, princess, to devise anything worse. Look at this. . . . How fortunate!

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I happen to have some charcoal in my pocket."

Out of the recesses of his long cloak he extracted a pointed black fragment and therewith began to draw a design, complicated and yet graceful, on the white marble step of her tower, merely remarking, while his hand moved along with incredible rapidity: "Your proportions, you see, are at fault. One should be fastidious and reverent in such matters — yes, reverent — please note that word "— the thing was completed, before she had time to think of a rejoinder to this speech. She looked in amazement at the marvellous drawing.

"Only a sketch," he said.

On many later occasions she noticed that Theophilus, however brusque and opinionated and cantankerous, invariably assumed a humble tone when talking of art, as though oppressed with the burden of its possibilities, or diffident of his own talents.

At this juncture she found nothing more to say.

She glanced at him swiftly, wondering yet again who this stranger might be. Was he really a Greek? That beard and pale complexion and wrinkled forehead — they seemed Jewish. She knew the Hebrews; the wealthy merchants, as well as certain less reputable members of the tribe of whom she had crucified six or

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seven for extorting outrageous interest from her pet cultivators of fruit. His manner was difficult to define: his clothing unquestionably Oriental, sumptuous and reaching to the ground, of the finest quality, but without ostentation. A curious dagger hung at his girdle of green silk. He had a weary aspect, as of one who despairs of mankind; yet, when he talked of his favourite subjects, a kind of flame seemed to burn within those restless, deep-set eyes. She knew that scorching flame. It had hovered about her, sometimes, in the dead hour before dawn.

She would have enquired point-blank about his nation, his business, had local tradition not stood in the way. To respect anonymity, to show no interest in a man's calling or antecedents, was an unwritten law of the town and considered, by many, to be its principal attraction. Folks came here for such different purposes; the place was full of mysterious and ambiguous characters. Theophilus might be anything — a potentate in disgrace, a voluptuary, an assassin, an honest trader. Or had he merely come to spy on Kenwyn, as she thought that day when they met at the dragon's den? She would find out sooner or later! Meanwhile she could not help observing, as her eye flitted back to the charcoal sketch:

"Yours is a practiced hand. Doubtless you have studied the arts of construction."

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"I have built some things in my day. Towers and bridges; also a few churches. Ay! Churches for Christians," he said, with a glum smile. "Only a short while ago I raised a belfry in this very land. I have also done a little work out there," and he pointed vaguely northwards, in the direction of Aithryn's realm. "When you go to Byzance, princess, do not omit to view the dome of Saint Sophia. Your humble servant — he reared it, though the fact has been maliciously expunged from the registers."

"I shall not go to Byzance just yet," she replied. "I dislike the thought of leaving my old parents."

"Indeed? Tell that to your friend."

"You said, Theophilus?"

"Tell that to Kenwyn. Unicorns have no parents."

She understood. It was idle to prevaricate with this man.

"You are right. They have no parents. They only think of beauty. We have some fine structures here," she went on, "built by a Roman."

"By a Roman! What beauty ever came out of Rome? What does Rome stand for? Usefulness. What have we to do with usefulness? The Romans end, where we begin."

"You are right. That is a noble dagger of

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yours. I never saw its like. I love to see new things, and always new things."

He drew the weapon out of his girdle. The blade was wavy, flawless; the hilt, terminating in the figure of a parrot's beak, had been wrought of steel and inlaid with tangled arabesques and spirals of flowery gold.

"Persian stuff," he said. "An elaborate affair! Pray accept it as a gift. I happen to have its exact counterpart at my lodging. Oh, my wealth is considerable," he added, noticing her hesitation. "It will bear the strain. Oblige me."

She held it awhile musingly. It was thus with every new product of art, great or small, which hand could touch or eye survey; she yearned to unravel its meaning and to explore the processes whereby it justified its title to her admiration; she felt drawn towards such objects as other men feel drawn towards friends or blood-relations. This little dagger! How much thought and cunning, she now reflected, and what a world of patient experimentation, lay enfolded in this trifle of double purpose. . . . The blue blade, fashioned for sinister practical needs and wedded, none the less, to that purely ornamental adjunct. . . . Thus life should be; a dagger, a beauteous dagger. . . . The grip, bent into a

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shapely curve, the bird's beak outlined in slender strips of gold, while layers of the same material, diverging from its eyes, invaded the black steel with their glitter . . . how crafty, how pleasing! Only metal-work, but of a kind to which her dwarfs could never aspire. Well, their day was over. They were about to be dismissed from her service.

"It is a fair implement, and you greatly tempt me!" she confessed. "But I do not like to feel indebted to you."

"Make me your debtor in return. You are about to dismiss your dwarfs ——"

"Who told you that?"

"Be gentle with them, princess. They are good little people and doubtless, not long ago, made you happy with their lore. It is not surprising that you should now have reached the limit of their powers. We are apt to outgrow our teachers in wisdom, but whoever has helped us to a larger understanding is entitled to our gratitude for all time. That strikes me as honest dealing. It would be strange if they could still fulfil your desires in every respect; if, for instance, they could paint scenes on plaster ——"

"That reminds me of what you told our armourer Lelian about the walls of one tint, and how their colour may be made to endure by mixing it with the plaster. An admirable idea!

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Belen alone knows why I never thought of it."

"Belen is old. He has forgotten all he ever knew."

"But those variegated pictures on white walls," she went on, "those scenes of hunting and revelry and old-fashioned worship — you must have observed, Theophilus, how ill they look when their black and red and blue begins to run down the white surface with rain or sea moisture ——"

"They always look ill. A positive eyesore! Why bedaub the streets in this barbaric fashion?"

She did not allow herself to be troubled by this outburst, but proceeded calmly:

"Can they ever be held fast? I fear you will not succeed in this feat."

"If it comes to that, won't I?" said the other gaily. "See," he continued, "here is a wall of fresh plaster which your clumsy masons have just left. Already a little too dry," he remarked, running his hand over the surface which he then splashed with a brush from a pail of water, "and badly worked over — it should be smoother — some marble dust would not have been amiss . . . however, rather than blame your people, I will draw a little scene from my own country; merely a sketch, to show the process."

And his hand that held the charcoal began

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to trace upon the wet expanse certain outlines of a group of festal figures, draped and naked, wending upwards under an avenue of trees towards some grandiose structure on a hill-top; a joyous company, fair to see, and in a style altogether new to the princess. "Now for a few tints. Here are my brushes," he pursued, diving once more into the folds of his cloak. "That is lucky. I thought I had left them at home, And how considerate of you, princess, to have placed these pots of colours at my feet, just when we needed them!"

"Those colours, I vow, were not there a moment ago."

"Where else should they have been? Pray observe how they conduct themselves," he added, proceeding to fill in the black outlines with flesh tints and verdant green and the blue of midday and silvery marbles tones. She watched. As by enchantment there grew up before her eyes a wondrous spectacle; the figures came to life; they breathed and moved in radiant sunshine, while he said, still continuing at his task in a mood of ardent exaltation:

"Drawn downwards, you see, into the moist plaster, and looking all the more mellow in consequence. They will not fade quite so soon as those harsh miserable daubs of which you spoke. I know another method which is far more durable

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and which I will explain to you on some future occasion ——" his hand suddenly left the wall.

"Ah, finish it! That young warrior's arm — fill it in ——"

"Enough for today," he replied.

Theophilus, plainly, was not going to be "worked to the bone," like the rest of them.

"Now tell me," she cried, "— tell me why I have never thought of that simple plan."

"You were waiting for me to teach you. Perhaps there is still room for improvement inside that pretty little head of yours."

She was about to say: "You are right, Theophilus." She refrained and grew pensive. What did this man know? Things flashed through her mind. . . . A rare sense of ease and familiarity had crept over her while talking during those few moments. On his part, too, there was a complete absence of restraint. How came it about? It was as if a veil had been lifted between them, as if blood were speaking to blood. Why should they converse like friends? However far apart in age or sex or race, they were comrades in the spirit. Neither though of betterment.

What did this Greek know? It mattered not one jot what he knew! Such trivial considerations were swept aside in the immensity of her joy and relief at having at last come in contact

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with a man whose views she could respect; a man who was not wrong, but right. It was an exhilarating state of affairs, "like wine," she thought, "for those that drink it." Who cared what he knew! Yet something drove her to say:

"You are teaching me. You will put me under an obligation which is not to my taste, unless I can compensate you in some fashion. Why do you fall in with my fancies?"

"For fun," he replied rather grumpily, his artistic humour having taken flight once more. "Nevertheless," he went on, "I respect your scruples. I would not have you feel indebted to me, and if, on any future occasion, I can be of service to you — and I would like nothing better — rest assured of that ——" He sighed, seeming to grow slightly embarrassed as he spoke. And he took out of his pocket certain beads of Indian cornelian, a string of them, and began to count them thoughtfully. She had already seen him handling those beads; it was at her father's palace, when old Lelian had asked some question which may have caused pain or annoyance. "He is trying to calm himself," she concluded.

"Well?"

"Then by all means let us come to some arrangement," he said. "You are such a sensible

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young lady that there can be no fear of any conflict between us. I have several other notions in my head," he pursued, more fluently, while the old aspiring look came back into his eyes. "That colonnade by the harbour, for example — it is a mockery. I cannot bear to pass that way. I was also thinking, just now, of a portico to this tower, and marvelling that your old Roman muddler allowed such a chance to escape him. In fact, to be perfectly frank, this town of yours is apt to make me shudder. Fantastic! Barely sketched out."

"Barely sketched out," she echoed. "And now, let us settle our terms. I declare you are looking positively bashful!" she laughed. "You need not be shy with me. I have talked all my life to men of business, and to others. Hundreds of them! I hate misunderstandings."

"And I — I hate talking business," answered the Greek. "I was always absurdly sensitive, even as a little boy. Come now! Do I look like a person who wants payment, or needs it?" He spoke with obvious sincerity.

"You are not pretty, Theophilus. But you look honest. Honest men are sometimes hard to please. I have met two or three."

He sighed again, and said:

"As you wish. Let us be just to one another, for such is the basis of lasting friendship. We

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will make a clear contract as soon as you have had a little time to judge of my work and my ideas. Meanwhile, I shall consider myself amply repaid if you are tender to those dwarfs and allow me, in my spare time, to do what I can for them. We should be kind to workers in metal. That poor little Yuxo is pretty far gone ——"

Yuxo, she thought. He knows his very name!

"— And they have certain enemies in this town who would incite you to deal harshly with them. You know?"

"I know," she replied.

Kenwyn hated the dwarfs; he called them devil's folk and implored her to drive them into the wilderness whence they had come. Kenwyn . . . how far away he seemed, just then! That spiritual kind of beauty, that goodness, of which he had spoken — how far away! His drowsy twilight phrases about a revelation. . . . Here, before her eyes, was a revelation of another kind, tangible, and not to be denied. She gazed at the glowing composition on the wall and thought: one inch of this beauty is worth a league of Kenwyn's. He had now been preaching in the town for some little time; it was uphill work, he declared, making men strive after goodness; they greatly preferred striving after pleasure, "or beauty, as you call it." He had endeavoured to make the princess strive in the same direction,

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the only result of his ministrations being to fan a flame of unrighteous desire between them. Never for a moment had he touched her fiery intellect, but only that outward thing, its fiery complement, her senses. She often thought of him, not aware of the furiously restrained passion which lay beneath that calm exterior. He would yield at a touch! She was sometimes tempted to try the experiment. For the princess was not tepid; she disliked shawls, even those from the Roof of the World, and even on rainy afternoons.

"Kenwyn," said Theophilus, who seemed to have tracked her musings further and further back, into their dusky hiding-place, "he would have you ill-treat the dwarfs. No wonder. They give pleasure to men. They teach fair artifices. It is enough to make a Christian fear them. . . . A handsome person, I must say, with those dreamy blue eyes. If I were a young woman, I would try to forget that he has no brains behind them. And probably succeed," he added, "for he would yield at a touch, and make an ardent lover. He is none too old ——"

"My father dislikes them too."

"That ridiculous young person is no longer answerable for his opinions. He is often disgracefully drunk."

"You said, Theophilus?"

"Hopelessly drunk, your venerable father.

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He babbles. He is fast growing into a tankard, a barrel. Too military."

"You are right. I have said so more than once."

"Which reminds me of the key at his girdle, the key of the sluice-gate, and of what might happen to this low-lying city if some enemy should filch it from him while he is chattering fondly about his martial exploits. That key, princess, should be in your hands. Mark my words."

"Many a time have I attempted to take it from him! You cannot think how obstinate he is on that point. Parents are often strangely hard-hearted."

The other pondered awhile, and then said:

"Try again. You may find him amenable this evening."

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CHAPTER XIV

THEOPHILUS happened to be right. The princess caught her father in an uncommonly favourable mood. He began, of course, by saying:

"Another day, my little one, another day. Ask your mother ——" who, as usual on such occasions, was nowhere to be seen. Then, slowly, he gave way to her entreaties.

"The dear child!" he said at last. "Let her have it. What do I want with that stupid key, always dangling here? And here it is ——"

At this moment, for an unexplained reason, contrary to all precedent, and as though a demon had guided her footsteps, the royal mother suddenly appeared on the scene.

"You are giving the child that key?" she enquired. "Certainly not! I am surprised at you. Certainly not."

Dearly as she loved her daughter, and almost invariably as she gave way to her wishes, she now assumed an unwonted air of decision. Some blind force seemed to impel or inspire her to speak as she did.

"Such a sensible girl ——" the father began.

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"Certainly not. After all those entrails! Have you forgotten? Here is our good Ando. He shall favour us with his opinion. Now, Ando?"

The court prophet wished himself in some other place. He disliked family arguments and adjudications. While cherishing small affection for the protectress of his enemy the blue pest — "make no friend of a red-haired woman," he often said to himself — he had no desire, on the other hand, to vex her father, nor yet to disoblige her mother. He was in a fix. "Why was I born?" he wondered, and held his peace.

"Speak up, man," said the king.

"It is a problem requiring anxious thought."

"Try, my friend," objected the monarch, "try not to think too anxiously. You are a prophet. Try to prophesy, for a change. Now, Ando?"

"Prophets are like peaches — never to be squeezed until they are ripe. Otherwise they are liable to give sour juice. Let me sleep over it," he said, hoping that they would have solved the problem between themselves by next morning.

"Now, Ando?" asked the royal couple in one breath.

"The key has hung at that girdle for long, with eminent success to the city. May it hang there for ever! But note this: had you allowed me to sleep over it, I might have attained to some

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inspiration on the matter and advised differently. Fresh counsel is like fresh water — never to be swallowed with impunity."

Whereupon the king turned to the young lady:

"You hear? Another day, my child, another day."

Theophilus, when she brought him this news, seemed to take it with extraordinary calmness.

"I believe you are glad," she said to him. "I believe you knew beforehand."

"Not glad, princess, but only resigned. I am quite seasoned to such little disappointments, I never expect anything else. No harm, by the way, in trying again," he added wearily.

That explains his dissatisfied look, she thought.

So it came about that the queen, by one single act of opposition to her daughter's wishes, sealed her own fate and that of the city. Or was it her punishment for yielding, twenty years earlier, to the blandishments of Aithryn, when he stepped out of his pea-green boat?

That boat, it was afterwards discovered, kept its old colour, the owner having never dreamt of painting it blue, a tint he rather disliked. He had often dreamt, however, of returning to the scene of his gallant exploit, when the time was ripe. And the time was now ripe. For, among other things, the news which those spies successively brought from over the water had raised

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his perplexity and envy to an intolerable pitch. The city, they vowed, was opulent and fair to see: its trade had thriven beyond belief . . .

Now Aithryn, as it happened, was not the only person on earth to avail himself of spies. Theophilus, whether he employed such agents or whatever other means of garnering news he may have possessed, was remarkably well informed of all that took place in those distant regions of the North. Not long afterwards he imparted to the princess a few details — not nearly as many as he might have imparted — concerning the doings of what, for some reason of his own, he contemptuously called "that funny little man, that red-haired papa of yours."

It appeared that Aithryn, like other folks, had grown twenty years older in the interval; older, and possibly wiser; certainly sadder. His golden beard was streaked with threads of silver, and though that strange and almost god-like beauty still hung about him, a harassed look had settled on his face. There was trouble and grief in yonder rambling hyperborean castle, whose very embellishments — the crazy zigzag patterns of which the king had been so proud — were fading away from sheer neglect. He was too unhappy to concern himself with such matters.

He had begun to suffer a good deal of pain from his old wound; pain, too, of another kind.

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Things had gone ill with him. His consort had died. Of his two sons, one had been killed in battle, while the other was a prisoner in the hands of the painted Picts and never likely to escape from chains. Uswida, his only daughter, lay smitten with a terrible creeping malady which gnawed away her powers of speech and mocked all the arts of medicine. The thought of this progeny destroyed filled him with anguish unspeakable, for it was the mark and merit of this king to be "absurdly fond of his children," as Theophilus had said. He was alone. He looked around and saw nothing but mischief at home, mischief abroad. And here he lived, the last of the Aithryns. He glanced back upon the long line of his ancestors . . . the last of the Aithryns!

Now he was punished.

Punished: for what?

For hearkening to the druids. Something must be wrong with their counsel or their creed, otherwise such a torrent of evils could never have overwhelmed him.

Musing thus, he began to veer round to the Christians, who had meanwhile prospered in the land. They were enchanted. "He is at last coming to his senses," they said. They began to teach him things, and he began to give them things — parcels of soil and money for pious pur-

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poses. "A good man, our Aithryn," they declared, as the white-robed one would have said in their place, and actually had said, twenty years earlier. Instead of that, they now sadly observed: "Alack, the fellow is taking leave of his wits. He grows imbecile. We feared he would." That was because the king had learnt to pray fervently and to repent of his sins. Owing to age and the pain from his wound, he was a slower pupil than the Christians might have wished; certain doctrines which those others had failed to teach him — concerning Paradise and Hellfire, for instance — puzzled him so greatly that he was obliged to give them several large tracts of land before they would declare themselves satisfied with his progress. Even then, he understood their teachings but imperfectly.

Another spy returned. He told of the dwarfs, of all they had wrought for the adornment of the city, which caused his new-found Christian advisers, who misliked that race, to shake their heads. He told also of the princess, describing her tower, her charm of person and ardent activities; there was no mistaking those signs, thought Aithryn. Here was the predestined helper and confederate — his own blood. If only the All-Highest had seen fit to make her a boy, while he was about it! For the idea had promptly en-

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tered his head — a sign, maybe, of that growing imbecility which the druids had noticed — that she must be his own child. He would have been pleased at the discovery but for certain queer tales which he learnt anent her behaviour. Those tales — they gave him food for thought. Aithryn, who had grown good, was not edified by them; he wanted to do something, he knew not what.

"If she were somebody else's daughter," he argued in dull fashion, "it would be somebody else's affair. Whose affair is it now?"

So he brooded. For it was the peculiar strength of his race to cling to their offspring, their blood, however fortuitously gotten; family union had been the secret of their worldly success in an age when other great clans lost their rule through internal dissensions. At last he took the Christian advisers into his confidence and told them, somewhat shyly, the whole truth.

"Whose affair is it now?" he asked.

"Yours," they said. Trifling irregularities such as these, they then explained, could be compounded by means of gifts to the Church. Then he gave a few more miles of territory, and began to feel at ease again.

Another spy returned. His report was clear and convincing. The city had grown so sinful, it flourished so exceedingly, that there could be

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only one interpretation: the princess, its patron and creator, had sold herself to the devil.

"They do tell me," said Aithryn to his counsellors, "that she has sold herself to the devil."

The Christians held up their hands in horror.

"Her soul!" they cried. "Her immortal soul is imperilled. This is no trifling irregularity, O king."

"Is it possible? You alarm me. Please explain once more, slowly, what you said about Hell and Paradise."

They explained. They worked on his imagination and paternal feelings to a painful extent.

"That settles it," he thought.

Other crimes, they went on, could be compounded; this one, never! Moreover, the god-abandoned city must be destroyed — burnt, and razed to the ground.

"I know something better," said Aithryn.

"It will be a meritorious deed," they concluded. "You will gain Paradise."

"I care less about Paradise than about that girl"— a singular speech, which set his advisers wondering whether the druids, after all, were not right in what they said as to his wits.

Preparations were begun. There was much to be considered, in order that the enterprise should go off happily — calculations to be made concerning the season and tides and other contin-

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gencies. The spacious wave-coloured boat must be overhauled and rendered seaworthy once more. And all the time Aithryn was nerving himself for this final effort. Some demon seemed to have entered his being, for his health and spirits were observed to improve wondrously under the influence of this great hope; the ardent energy of his race descended upon him. The pain in that wound ceased to give trouble; he was now engaged upon a good work. He would overwhelm the town; he would restore his daughter and bring her home, to carry on his dominion.

"And gain Paradise," said his counsellors.

"True," he replied. . . .

What could the old king, as he lay in bed that evening, know of all these happenings in the dim regions of the white North? Nothing whatever. Yet an omen appeared to him in the night; a strange, unlovely omen. He saw before his eyes a watery expanse — leagues and leagues of green ocean, weltering right up to the foot of the distant hills. While gazing in astonishment upon this dream-spectacle, he became aware of an unusual scratching sound. Suddenly that pink porpoise, that fateful fish of forty years ago, came flying into the window of his chamber. The beast was changed. It was flushed to an almost hectic hue, pinker than ever, though sickly-looking, and dwindled to the size of a

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mackerel. After whirling silently round the room three or four times, it sat down on the pillow beside his head and, instead of laughing as of old, began to croak disconsolately:

"More water, more water, more water ——"

More water, thought the monarch. Now: what on earth does it mean? I give it up!

He nudged his consort, who was slumbering at his side.

"The porpoise! Wake up! Perhaps it will talk again."

"In the morning ——"

"The porpoise, I say."

"In the morning ——"

"In the morning. Always in the morning. Nobody wants to talk to me. Certainly not. Wake up! I like to converse, and I shall. . . . No talk? Then sing a song. The old song about the swan that came flying out of the North. What did the swan come for, I wonder? Belen alone knows. . . . No song? Then bring me a trumpet, straight or curved ——"

"In the morning ——"

"In the morning. Nobody loves me. . . . Nobody! That daughter of ours — what a portent. You say she is hot. I find her mighty cold; cold as a stone. A metallic girl. She says she will dismiss the dwarfs to please her old father. I say: to please herself. How came I ever to have

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such a child? Belen alone knows. And Belen never tells. Did you see her face when I refused her the key? Did you? It made me shiver. . . . I used to play with her and make her toys. If she knew how often I thought about her. All brain, no heart. Can one live without heart? Certainly not. I could cry about it. I am a little older than I used to be. Old men should be treated kindly. Can't you do something to make her love me? Can't you?"

"In the morning——"

"In the morning. And this is what one calls a wife. Well, well! Nobody loves me. Certainly not. I always thought so. Now I know. Now I know. Now I know. . . ."

The news of the king's dream created a sense of disquietude in the town, chiefly among the old believers who were always "prepared for the worst," as they said, having never forgotten that first Christian preacher's curses, and how he prophesied a watery fate to their city in certain ominous words about retribution from the sea. At the palace, too, everybody felt more or less oppressed and ill at ease. The court prophet alone was seen to smile. He had a reputation to keep up.

"What says Ando?" enquired the king.

"I distrust these subtle far-fetched interpretations," he replied. "It is the summer season,

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when creatures of many shapes are wont to start up from their slimy depths, and writhe and crawl and scramble and flutter about with strange antics. Now what have we here? We have a kind of sea-beast in the royal sleeping apartment. This beast, good sirs, is not like me. It wants more water. It wants to return to the ocean. No wonder! A bedroom is not the place for a fish."

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CHAPTER XV

SHE thought it singular that Theophilus should be wearing a dagger alike down to the minutest details of workmanship to the one he had given her. It was one of many odd things about him. Sometimes she was tempted to beg for this one too, in order to see whether he could produce a third. It would not have astonished her. The man was full of surprises.

She refrained, wishful not to place herself under more obligations than necessary.

Obligations — were they veritable obligations, or only marks of friendship on his part? She could not make up her mind; it was a troublesome question. She would say to herself: "Tomorrow, tomorrow. I will think about it tomorrow." The next day came, and the next, and still she drifted along in blissful heedlessness. It was so much more enjoyable to discuss matters of art, to listen to his views on men and things, or to watch his marvellous hand at work. Yet there were moments when she felt dissatisfied and on the verge of demanding how she could requite him for his pains. He had placed

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his time, his ideas, his entire person at her disposal. So much was certain.

How set about it? How approach the subject? For Theophilus was different from earlier helpers. The strange sense of comradeship and familiarity which had grown up between them made it hard for her to touch upon the mundane theme of remuneration. He was so evidently a travelled man of the world, accustomed to ease and the life of courts; more like a brother, some wise elder brother. How could she suggest paying for his teaching? He took much manifest pleasure in filling her mind with fresh notions and explaining new processes of construction or painting. It seemed as if he had nothing whatever to do save to fall in with her fancies. He relished work; it was one of the points in which he resembled the now neglected dwarfs, who used to call it "play." Unlike them, however, and unlike the defunct Ormidius Limpidus, he never allowed himself to be "worked to the bone." No. He had been so firm, and even impolite, on those occasions when she had striven to make him produce something beyond his inclination that nowadays she never attempted the feat. There was nothing to be done with Theophilus when he was not in his creative mood. He would grow sombre and discontented once more, while that sparkle, that inner light, faded out of his eyes.

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He would begin playing with those beads like any other sulky merchant, Greek or Jew. "No wonder he is morose," she then thought, "and irritable, and even contradictory — with talents like his."

There was another difference between him and those former teachers. They had their limitations: he had none. His fancy could rise to the clouds, and his craftsmanship keep pace with it. Nothing seemed impossible to this man. Doubtless, if so disposed, he could throw an arch from earth to the stars. And it was the same in quite small matters. One day he painted an admirable portrait of Harré in his blue costume, a costume of which, by the way, he strongly disapproved. (Though not much of a prude, Theophilus had certain violent prejudices of his own.) It amused the princess greatly. And what amused her even more was a caricature of the poor old king, so unflattering a likeness that in olden days she might have professed to feel annoyed. Now she laughed. She was changing. Her parents had grown into objects of mirth.

"Hit off to the life," she declared. "He is trying to look royal, but cannot. No wonder, with that nose! And now make me a picture of my other one — of the red-haired little man in the North, you know, about whom you have told me."

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Whereupon he did a sketch of Aithryn seated gravely on his throne, with a tall silver crown, and that golden beard flowing majestically over sea-green robes — an imposing apparition but for the eyes, into which the artist contrived to put an almost imbecile look.

"A handsome man, you perceive," he said. "He would have been intelligent like yourself, had his skull not been injured in that accident."

Ah, Theophilus — he was different from all the rest of them! "At last," she often thought, "I am truly learning. Up to this moment I have stumbled forwards in the dark. Now I see the light ahead. All my life I have waited for this man. He is my beacon."

One of the first things the Greek had taken in hand was a portico to her tower. Hitherto the citizens who walked along the embankment would pass in the open before the door of that house, which stood on the inner side of the vast sea-wall. "Let them walk through a covered porch," said Theophilus —"a porch whose arches shall bestride the entire embankment and plant their feet in the sea. Overhead we will repeat the pattern," he explained, "and rear a breezy chamber beautified with paintings. Its roof shall be supported on dainty columns. Thereto you will step from your middle storey to take your pleasure on summer evenings, to listen to

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conversation and sweet music, and enjoy the prospect over the ocean."

It struck her as an excellent idea. She wondered, as usual, why she had never thought of it herself.

And now the structure drew towards completion. Her friend was engaged at that moment in etching upon its inner wall a wonderful colour-design according to that more complicated and durable system which he had meanwhile made clear to her. She watched admiringly. He was in rare good humour.

"You are gay, Theophilus."

"Joy lies in creation, not in the thing created. All life should be thus — building, and unbuilding, and building anew with ever fresh enthusiasm and ever deeper insight. If this city should one day be swept away, we will found a new one in another place, a better place. The site of this flat town has grave defects; it does not give full scope to our talents."

He had touched upon that subject once or twice before, as though preparing her mind for some possible catastrophe. At first she was sad at the thought that her dream might be destroyed. Latterly she had grown more accustomed to the idea. Here or elsewhere — what mattered it, so long as Theophilus remained at her side; so long as she was learning and seeing

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new things, always new things? None the less, she observed:

"The All-Highest will permit no more floods. So Kenwyn says. He placed the rainbow in the sky ——"

"He is old. Yet that rainbow was there before he was born. Believe me, princess, he works by spasms nowadays. He fumbles and gropes. Talking of rainbows, for example: not long ago he drowned everybody in a fit of bad temper at one of his own blunders. Then he repented of his rage, and sent some one to save them again. He is liable to repeat such frolics. You must be prepared for anything, my lady, where he is concerned."

"But Kenwyn says ——"

"Fancy listening to Kenwyn! And that reminds me ——"

Theophilus seemed to grow suddenly thoughtful and embarrassed. He laid down his brushes with a sigh.

"Reminds you of what?" she enquired.

"Nothing. . . . Another day! I hate that subject."

She guessed his thoughts.

"I am glad you mentioned it. Now don't be timid, like last time. Come, let us talk frankly. Tell me what your recompense should be. You shall have it! Fifty pounds of minted gold is

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none too much for what you have done. I will give you a hundred, and another hundred when this portico and the colonnade by the harbour is completed. Are you content?"

"My wealth, princess, is considerable. No gold for me."

"No gold? You are perplexing, Theophilus. What would you have then? Me?" she added with a laugh.

The man looked uncommonly grumpy at this jocular suggestion. He said:

"I am not an Ethiopian chieftain. Or even a Roman engineer."

Once again, as often before, the thought flashed through her mind; what did he know? She was well aware that there had been some talk in the town regarding the disappearance of certain prominent folks. It was astonishing, nevertheless, how he had been able to pick it all up.

Who cared what he knew! His knowledge of this or that incident in her life mattered nothing whatever, provided he went on with the portico and those other projects. All the rest was of no account. Let him unravel all her little secrets! She replied, quite simply:

"True. You are not as pretty as that Ethiopian, nor as meddlesome as the Roman. Your price?"

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He sighed yet again and appeared to be nerving himself for an unpleasant task.

"There are some subjects," he began, "which one feels a kind of delicacy in approaching ——"

"You are going to be coy again. This will never do. Out with it!"

He leaned his head on one side, whimsically, as though listening to something underground, and remarked:

"Water flowing."

"Is there?" she enquired in her airiest manner. "You must have good ears, Theophilus."

"The gods have favoured me in this respect, and I am duly grateful. It must be a terrible affliction to be deaf! Have you ever thought, princess, what it would mean to be unable to hearken to pleadings of love or words of wisdom, to music, the blithe carollings of birds and all those sweet mysterious voices of nature ——"

"You are wandering from the point, my good friend. Your price?"

"To be sure. What a disagreeable topic! I wish I were a thousand miles from here. I have always been ridiculously shy; it is the curse of my existence. He must go."

"He must go. He? Who?"

"Beauty is manifold, and inexhaustible, and hard of attainment," he began again. "Goodness is ever the same. There is only one kind

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of goodness to a myriad forms of beauty. You flattered me, the other day, by saying that I could build a roadway from this earth of ours to the stars. Perhaps I could. Perhaps — who knows? — I have already built it, for certain ardent ones ——"

"Ah, Theophilus, help me to step that way!"

"Between goodness and beauty there yawns a gulf which none can bridge over. Uphill work, princess, trying to make men strive after beauty and rise aloft. It is so much easier to make them good, to keep them grovelling earthwards, that sometimes I think that I, too, will grow into a preacher in my old age. Can you picture me preaching and endeavouring to instil into your poor little heathen mind some notions of the true God and ——"

"Your price?"

"Oh, I have good friends among the Christians; men of a different stamp; men who sympathize with my aspirations. As to this one — pray don't make me go into details. Pray take my meaning."

She took his meaning. It was idle to prevaricate with Theophilus.

"Why that one?" she asked. "It seems a pity."

"It is never a pity to uproot a menace. Has he not spoken disparagingly of your work?

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Would he not destroy this city if he could?"

"He would. He thinks differently from us. His right is not our right, and his wrong is not our wrong. But he means well."

"Foolish men, my lady, always mean well. He would overturn our work, and say he meant well. We have enemies enough without him; the All-Highest, I mean, and that red-haired papa of yours. They are leagued together, like all good folks, for the destruction of beauty. Envy makes strange bed-fellows."

The princess did not know what more to say. A wave of perplexed sadness was sweeping over her. She had ceased a good while since to pay any heed to the exhortations of Kenwyn; she was deaf to his arguments. She could not be blind to his spirit, his reserve. The Christian was different from all those other men who had hitherto laid their hearts at her feet. He suffered in silence. For the first time in her life there mingled, with that disdainful sensuality of hers, a strain of something purer and akin to affection. She knew, and began to respect, the anguish which lay behind his speechlessness, though even now — even at that very moment, while thinking of these things — she was tempted by that coarse demon of the flesh which hung about her —

"To make him yield by a touch," observed

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Theophilus, interrupting the current of her meditations and striving, as once before, to reach that dark, defective chord in the caverns of her soul, "it would be no hard matter. Dry as tinder! Touch him, and then——" Once more he leaned his head on one side, whimsically.

She gazed for a long time over the sea before replying. How calm it lay there! Something of its luminous tranquillity entered into her being, for she said:

"I know not how it is; I have changed of late. Try to believe what I say. I am purging myself of earthly humours. I care more for your teaching than for a thousand lovers. This portico is my dream. As to doing what you say — I cannot. He has gained a place, a small place apart for himself. It is the truth."

Theophilus merely remarked:

"You asked me to name my price. I obeyed your commands."

"I cannot. You taught me to be reverent and sensitive, and to think of other matters. It is your fault."

"My fault! It has always been my fault, ever since I was a little boy. So be it. I am seasoned to such disappointments — oh, quite! I never expect anything else. I will now seek another princess, a more reasonable one, and begin building afresh."

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She could not help laughing at this speech.

"Another princess? You will never find her."

"Won't I?" said Theophilus. "They are not nearly as scarce as one thinks. Loth as I am to leave this portico undone, I depart today."

"Depart?" she cried anxiously. "You depart this day, leaving your work undone? That is wrong."

"Your lover would call it right."

"Besides, you promised ——"

Theophilus broke in, and never had he spoken so sternly:

"I promised nothing. Be good enough to leave me what I hold dearer than life itself — my reputation for honest dealing. This is a town for monks. I depart. Farewell."

"Depart," she echoed. She could hardly believe her ears. The enormity of her loss revealed itself, all at once, in that single word. Depart! It was the death-sentence of her ambitions.

"You break me in two," she said, and her voice sunk to a whisper. "Ah, how you make me suffer! You are my master, my inspirer. All undone, like this?"

"All undone! Come now," he added in more jovial tones, "are you going to let him stand in

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your way? Think it over. A portico is worth a preacher."

She surveyed the structure dearer to her heart than mortal man had ever been. A wrong, a foul wrong would be done if this thing of beauty, destined to grow harmoniously to its close, should now be snapped asunder. And while her eyes ran over the fair outlines she began to feel an ache within her, that old familiar ache at the back of her forehead which assailed her in times of mental anguish — something striving to break loose. An ache, and then a mist —

Tears, hot tears: they welled forth and rolled down her cheeks; the first of all her life. She raised a hand in marvelling fashion to her face, and felt their moisture. She said:

"Strange! Wet! Now I know what they feel, those who cry. How I suffer! . . . All undone? Can you bear the thought of it? Then I too am undone, for it is part of myself. Speak, Theophilus."

The other was no longer at her side.

She glanced down and saw him limping away, far below, in the direction of the harbour. "I must follow," she thought.

It was the hour before midday.

There, on the placid green water, a boat was seen moving away from the quay — the boat of

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Manthis. Four of her elder girls rowed; in the stern, holding the rudder, sat Kenwyn who was now on his way to the Sacred Rock, rather reluctantly, in response to an oft-repeated invitation on the part of the kindly old dame. He looked landwards and, recognizing the princess, waved his arm. She waved back; she smiled instinctively as often before; her smile soon melted into something different.

A voice at her side remarked:

"Our enemy."

"You are right, Theophilus. I have come to see your point of view. Would you delay your departure if ——"

"I desire nothing better. And now we will go back to the portico and do a little painting. An idea has just occurred to me. And — oh, princess, never let us talk business again. It distresses me more than I can say."

"Never again. It distresses both of us. You made me cry, Theophilus. No man has ever done that before. It was rather unpleasant."

"It seems to be my fate to make people cry. A most vexatious state of affairs," he declared, in a tone of genuine annoyance. "I wish something could be done about it."

"Don't take it to heart, my good friend. Bother that preacher! I was altogether in the

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wrong. Make me cry again, as often as you please. Only help me to learn."

How soft she had grown — so far, at least, as this foreigner and his art caprices were concerned!

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CHAPTER XVI

THE boat of Manthis glided outward, her children rowing in sailorly fashion. It was a windless summer day; deep blue sky overhead. They skirted a few rock-islets against which the waves were lapping with scarcely a ripple.

Kenwyn said nothing. He saw nothing of the landscape. He had caught her smile; not the look that followed. He mused distractedly:

"I am not myself. I am somebody else. Happy Gwenulf! Happy Manthis! It is easy to be pure at their age."

Then the visions began again; tormenting visions of contact with the flesh. Her influence upon him was of the lowest and strongest kind. There was no reasoning with it. A desire haunted him by day and by night, a burning desire not vague but definite, and one which no holy texts could quench. As in a dream he watched the mainland receding from view, and wondered whether he would encounter her on his return to the town in the evening. He feared he would. He hoped he would. "For this can endure no longer," he thought.

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In the college, meanwhile, a great calm prevailed. Morning lessons were over; it was the brief spell of relaxation before the midday meal. Manthis, all alone, had walked a few paces up the winding path to that garden which her children and herself had laboriously wrested from the bleak soil. There, on her favourite wooden bench, she reposed awhile, looking over the tree tops of a young plantation and rows of trim vegetables in the direction of the city, one corner of whose mighty embankment and brazen turrets could be seen far away, gleaming across the water and overhung, on these summer mornings, by a roseate canopy of sea mist and ascending smoke.

She was awaiting Kenwyn, due to arrive for the midday meal.

All around were rocks; a cirque of ancient grey boulders. Some cattle were pasturing overhead on a green sunshiny meadow near the lake. They belonged to that small farm which supplied the inmates of the college with dairy produce, and where they learnt the rudiments of husbandry. Ranged in a row beside her seat stood the beehives. She loved to watch the busy coming and going of the insects, and many an object lesson in domestic economy had her children gleaned from their habits, particularly in regard to the treatment of the male.

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They tired her, those young ones, more than she cared to confess. Manthis was growing old. She needed rest and solitude at times. Today, as often before, she yearned not for solitude but for companionship, the companionship of some thoughtful woman like herself.

It was not to be. The friends she knew were her equals in no respect. Manthis was alone in the world; she had ever been alone. There was a gulf between her and the rest of mankind. True, she taught her girls — history, mythology, botany, medicine and other subjects; she could influence their development up to a point. Even here, as teacher, she was hampered by inexorable precedent, and that perfect frankness of speech, which she held to be the greatest good, was denied her in regard to them. Tradition, and public opinion, and parents — they had all to be taken into account. Not that these latter ventured to approach her personally. There was no approaching Manthis. They contrived, none the less, to make their peculiar wishes and whims known through her under-teachers and even through the queen, whom she could not wholly disregard; the nobles and old believers insisting upon a rigid adherence to methods of bygone centuries, while certain pushful merchants suggested innovations which she dared not introduce, "not yet," she would say to herself. A

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difficult ship to steer! Often she wished her college stood far away from the town, in some spot where she could have a "fair chance," and mould the children as they deserved to be moulded. Her status of priestess completed the isolation. She was an oracle; she moved among formulas and rites. "I am an old granite island," she thought, "all alone in the sea. It is not well to be a granite island. It is not well to grope alone. One gropes in a groove. I would purge myself of dross to my dying day. Deprived of the clash, the sword grows rusty. I need a friend, a helper."

To some such friend she would then have said, speaking of the subject which was nearest her heart:

"We must strive after betterment and happy social conditions, is it not so? What makes for betterment? Justice, peaceful rule. What is the hinge of peaceful rule? Family life. The hinge of family life? Woman."

"How true!" the imaginary friend would reply.

"The male is not deficient in a kind of animal docility. He only needs proper guidance, for the good of his country and his own. He is the irrigating or fertilizing element; a torrent which, left to itself, would devastate the land. This necessary but rugged force must be tamed,

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banked up, and diverted from its natural impulses to serve the welfare of mankind. It must learn to turn the mill."

"It must."

"It must. All that strength and energy wasted, owing to lack of sound direction! What has our race not achieved by means of the intelligence, such as it is, of dogs or horses? And is the intelligence of our own male not immeasurably superior to theirs? May I never be thought to dispraise his natural virtues, or to lay undue stress upon those infirmities which clog his footsteps! To speak quite frankly, I see no limit to the results which could be obtained from men, if our own sex were properly brought up. The capture and exploitation of the male, my friend, is a grave, urgent, practical matter. It is no dream."

"Quite the reverse! It is the most pleasant of all your discoveries. You leave your age behind, O Manthis, gasping for breath."

The exploitation of the male: it was the cream of her doctrine, her enduring legacy to posterity; and if the women of her country are to this day intent upon the same ideal, and upon nothing else whatever, it is entirely due to the teaching of that delightful old druidess and pioneer, the quite-too-chaste-and-venerable Mother Manthis, whose "chance" came shortly afterwards.

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For the rest, she had not always been quite too chaste. Men thought differently once upon a time, and the great central college at Karnut, in particular, confessed to a rooted prejudice against the virginal state on the part of those who were destined to instruct others in the ways of the world. Wisely, perhaps. For who, ignorant in knowledge of mankind, shall be able to instil notions of right conduct into the minds of the young? It was thus that Manthis, though aloof from passions nowadays, remained tinged with mellow sympathy, as the clouds of evening wear their rosy livery after the sun has set. She had not lacked the necessary experience long ago. Far from it! A certain of her love affairs, with a young nobleman from Tarragona, proved to be — as she once told the sentimental old queen —" a liberal education."

" Ah," she had added, in a burst of confidence, " if all men were like that! They are not."

" Or like my wonderful stranger on the embankment," thought the other. " I wonder where he now is. He promised to come again. What will happen if he does? And I wonder — I wonder whether he ever painted his boat blue? "

Aithryn's boat, at that moment, was being overhauled with a view to putting to sea; over-

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hauled and repainted bright green, blue being a colour which the sovereign rather disliked.

The druidess, for all her wisdom and insight, knew nothing of these matters. Yet, as she glanced towards the distant city, she realized that a change was taking place within its walls. The influence of Theophilus over the princess had become a common subject of talk. Little cared Manthis who this Greek might be, provided he left her girls alone! She regarded him as a man of considerable talent who, like all too many of his kind, misused his natural gifts. Somehow or other, she found herself unable to read his *Awenn*. That of the city, however, was plain to her understanding; it was doomed. Partly for this reason she had moved the college hither, out of the way of harm; and partly by reason of the growing viciousness of the place. Whatever happened out yonder, her children, the embodiment of her aspirations, should survive to form the nucleus of a better community.

And her thoughts went back to the pupils. Of those things which lay nearest her heart she often spoke to the more advanced of them with a fair amount of freedom; it was part of a "pure instruction"; never had she dared to put her thoughts as clearly as she would have liked, on this wise:

"Women in recent times have made a mis-

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take. They have tried to be useful. The useful woman is the worst of all. Take your choice, children: be useless or indispensable. Be indispensable! Catch your male and put him in harness. Make him forget his dreams, his quarrelling and loafing habits; keep him on earth and tire him out. Then appear as his reward, his friend, his saviour. That is the way to make him healthy and grateful. Never forget that he is a mere incident in your lives; a bullock to draw your cart — docile or obstinate according as he is treated. Appeal to his feelings, children, and restrain your own. Where woman masters her feelings, there the family prospers. The gods, in their great wisdom, have given to man one sense too many. Touch that sense; touch it with artful moderation, as you are taught to touch a lyre, and you have him! He is the weakest of the weak ——"

At this point of her meditations she raised her eyes and saw, as if in answer to her thoughts, the figure of Kenwyn approaching in her direction. He stumbled absent-mindedly up the hill.

The weakest of the weak!

Beside him went the babchick, who had been deputed to meet the visitor and was doing her utmost to make herself agreeable. The babchick had pleasant memories of their conversation in the garden of the beasts. How charm-

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ingly he then talked of dragons and sea-gulls! She was disappointed to find him so dull.

Yet at one moment it seemed as if the pent-up soul of Kenwyn was to find relief. His lips had been sealed since his arrival in the town; he had made no confidences; now something drove him to trust in this child and to utter certain burning words about love and how that a man should follow the bright flame whithersoever it led, seeing that in sweet union, and nowhere else, could peace be found on earth —

"He is trying to make me blush," thought the babchick. She said:

"I think we should hasten our steps to join the good Mother Manthis."

"Why?"

"Because, for one thing, she told me to."

The druidess was not disappointed. She was prepared for his dejection; she knew the cause. Yet she marvelled at his lack of self-restraint. Irresponsible creatures of sense! What an object lesson, she suddenly thought, for her girls! She would have liked to call together the wiser of them and set forth the case of Kenwyn, exhibiting him dispassionately as though he were a unicorn, or suchlike.

"This is what I wished you to see, children. Look at him, and tell me your conclusions. This is the male of our species; there are un-

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numbered multitudes of them, and they are all alike, or nearly all (she thought of Tarragona). They want to rule the world — these feathers, tossed by the wind! And when you have inspected him, turn your eyes yonder."

"Whither, O wise one?"

"Towards the beehives. All sweetness and order, and all subordinate to the common good. Have you ever seen bees wrangling, or loafing, or absent-minded?"

"No, never!"

There was great friendliness in her words of greeting to Kenwyn, and a smile on her old face. Soon she was telling him of the difficulties she had encountered in settling the school upon this sterile rock; after dinner, she added, they would inspect the whole establishment within and without. Kenwyn uttered a few commonplace remarks.

"You have wrought a miracle," he said, "judging by what I have already seen. In those few years! It shows what one can do when one's heart is in the work."

"I had many willing helpers. But the garden has suffered somewhat from drought this year. Those radishes," she went on, with that eye for detail which befits all rulers of men, "they have not thriven as they should."

"They seem to have too many leaves."

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"And small roots. It is their nature. They are the ancient Armorican kind. I must really ask the princess if she does not know of a worthier variety from some other province. She is wondrously well informed about such things; nobody understands more than she does about fruit and vegetables."

"I know," said Kenwyn.

He thought of the calm evening on the embankment when she told about her experiments in grafting. It came back to him, how they conversed during that moment of untroubled sweetness while looking into the sunset-glow. The scent of sea-wrack, the oozy shore dappled with stranded fishing-boats, the islets great and small, the beacon-lights that leapt suddenly out of the water to guide home-coming vessels — he remembered it all, all save her ferocious treatment of that poor pilot. "Pleasant here. . . . Commerce is safe. . . ." How happy he had been! And now he was full of perplexity and bitterness. A wave of poignant grief swept over him.

There reached his ears, at that moment, an awe-inspiring sound, a strident clangour that rose and sank in a wail of anguish among the cirque of granite rocks and filled his soul with terror.

"It is nothing," said Manthis, observing his

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perturbation. "Nothing! The call to the midday meal; an Oriental thing; it shouts when smitten. My little ones amuse themselves with beating it wildly at this hour, and I have not the heart to forbid them."

Then, as they descended, she went fully into the history of that disc of bronze. Many years ago, she said, some man of the East, some grave saffron-hued merchant clad in shining silks, had laid the huge contrivance, together with other more intelligible gifts, at the king's feet. After the departure of the slit-eyed stranger the monarch puzzled and puzzled as to its purport, failing at last to turn it to any use whatever. "I give it up!" he said.

He therefore presented the concern to Manthis, as a plaything for her girls. "They can roll it up and down; it will strengthen their muscle," he suggested, knowing that she attached importance to such exercises.

"As for myself," she continued, "I realized that such instruments are not made for nothing, and determined to unravel its meaning. We have only to want, Kenwyn, and sooner or later we achieve. It was thus that, pondering, I observed it to be pierced at the rim. A pleasant discovery! For it gave me the idea that the disc was to be hung up by a leathern thong and employed, I conjecture, as an agricultural ad-

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junct, to frighten away birds from the crops with its awful voice. Well, we have changed its object! Little dreamt the men who fashioned it that, instead of scaring their own little birds from dinner, it now summons other little birds, in a distant country, to theirs. . . ."

Altogether — an unsatisfactory visit, although the druidess talked herself weary while trying to interest her guest. As Kenwyn, late in the afternoon, rose to leave, he said something polite about the modest manners of her pupils and their pretty faces, adding:

"Your little babchick, I fear, has found me rather dull today."

"Children are not always easy to please," she replied.

It was true. That young person took occasion, after his departure, to tell the others her opinion of the Christian.

"He is stupider than I thought," she declared.

"They often are," said Manthis, who had overheard the remark. "It rests with you, children, to improve their minds."

Whereupon the babchick, presuming on her exceptional status, drew nigh to the druidess and, whispering in her ear, posed a direct question. She asked:

"When will he be sacrificed?"

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"Tonight," said Manthis, who never told a lie.

"Oh, Belen!"

"Now run away, child."

Left to herself, the druidess reflected awhile upon the situation. She thought of Kenwyn with neither pity nor contempt, but a kind of deep despair. He might have been a friend, a helper; they might have worked together for the common cause of mankind, had he not been one of those impulsive ones. Feathers! Creatures of violence, or wrapped in fond illusions! She remembered Kenwyn's predecessor, that grey-haired horror; she thought of certain prominent males — of the doting king, of Ando the mendacious parasite, and Lelian hide-bound in prejudice and many other of the highest nobles in the land — drunkards, boasters, wife-beaters: what an assemblage! And these things want to rule the world! Grimly she set her teeth, more determined than ever to do her duty by the children. . . .

Day, meanwhile, was declining. The boat approached the shore. Would he see her?

She stood on the embankment, with Harré at her side. One would almost have said she was awaiting his arrival, had she not been a princess. She laid her hand on his arm, and smiled. Never had she spoken so endearingly. . . .

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CHAPTER XVII

NIGHT descended — hot, moonless night. The princess was reclining on a couch at the summit of her tower and watching a star, one single star, which had begun to shine overhead with steady flame. On earth, meanwhile, arose a merry twinkling of lights; they radiated from the harbour region, gleaming brightest at street corners where those turrets of brass threw their fiery reflection into the sky. The familiar sounds of nightfall climbed up to her ears in confused laughter and song — loudest of all, a chorus of drunken sailors hard by, on the embankment. Beyond the town walls everything lay shrouded. Grey mists were crawling about the plain.

She glanced down upon the water that breathed softly against the sea-wall. Far away, ever so far, were discernible a pair of dusky red spots on two sister islets, light-houses whose beacons, fed through the hours of darkness, guided home-coming vessels towards the entrance of the channel. She was pleased at the sight.

"Commerce is safe," she thought. "All is well."

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She listened awhile to the waves; that old, old music which had often lulled her to sleep. Would there be much sleep tonight?

Impossible that this tranquil ocean should ever grow into a monster threatening the security of the land. How calm it lay there! Yet Theophilus had of late dwelt upon the hazards of the embankment, and implored her to obtain possession of that key at the king's girdle. She invariably put him off; "tomorrow," she would say. Her friend appeared to have grown more timorous than formerly. He talked in dark words about Aithryn and the All-Highest, as though they were in league together for the destruction of all that lay at her feet — of those buildings in which she took such pride. Let them come! she thought. Theophilus would deal with them. She had blind confidence in her master. All was well.

Then, only a few days ago, he had once more spoken earnestly of founding another city elsewhere.

"Sometimes I think we are wasting our time here," he had said. "What can one do with a site like this? All flat! We need hills and woodlands and rivulets and waterfalls to play with. Only under such conditions can we hope to rear a town that shall be worthy of our efforts. Nothing will ever avail to diversify this scene.

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We need winding ways, and unexpected vistas and a luminous river and sunshine, more sunshine, glinting sunshine, to light up the bravery of our ideas. This place is past redemption. Fogs and mists! It is beginning to sicken me."

There were moments when the prospect of leaving her creation tormented the princess acutely. At other times she was in calmer mood. She felt the weight of his argument; she beheld visions of that more splendid abode which he conjured up before her eyes; she called to mind his words about building anew "with ever fresh enthusiasm and ever deeper insight." Here or elsewhere — what mattered it, so long as he remained at her side?

"I am ready to go when you are," she had replied, wondering none the less why Theophilus, who took such manifest pleasure in his work here, should be ready to relinquish it at a moment's notice. The man was full of contradictions! "He seems to be so attached to this town. . . . It sounds as if he were trying to convince not me, but himself," she decided.

"I know a most favourable spot," he had said, as though speaking to himself.

"Is it far off?"

"My boat could take us there."

Perhaps on yonder star, she now thought. Why not? Everything seemed to be possible in

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her present state of exaltation. She was losing touch with reality. She lived in a dream, learning and creating.

Then he had spoken again:

"The All-Highest — I distrust him. He thinks of usefulness. He moves in a mysterious way and chooses disreputable implements to do his bidding. I could tell you queer tales about him. Queer tales."

"My dear friend, I know them all."

So she did. Kenwyn had told her as much about the All-Highest as he knew himself, which was more than enough for most people.

"Yet sometimes," said Theophilus, "I feel almost sorry for him. He is so old! It must be disheartening to have done good work once upon a time, and now to be laughed at. I only wish he were not so fond of goodness, like that red-haired papa of yours, who has gone over to the Christians. They are very intimate just now, in consequence. What says Ando? Make no friend of a red-haired man. He has been a menace ever since that accident to his skull. I wish it had been cloven outright!"

She was astonished at this savage remark. It was the first bitter word she had heard from his lips. She said:

"That funny little man? Really, Theophilus, I do not know which of the two is the more

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ridiculous. Neither is worth talking about."

"Pardon me. Everything is worth talking about."

"Then tell me a little more concerning those pillars of Carystian marble ——"

He interrupted grumpily:

"I am not in the mood for discussing marbles."

Decidedly, her friend was growing somewhat nervous. . . .

Midnight came and went. Not a breath of wind. The air became sultrier than ever, and still she waited. Sounds from below were fewer, fainter; that band of tipsy sailors had not yet made an end of their revel. She leaned over, trying to catch the sense of their words.

"Something about love — about women," she concluded, with disgust. Drunkards and singers of low songs — beasts of the earth! What forms of happiness men sought! She thought of a newly-planned suburb beyond the northern gate, and found pleasure in contrasting her own refined strivings with those of the vile brutes down below. What did they know of such things? Bawling their coarse natures into the night! The ideas men have of love and life! She was shocked at their crudeness.

Beside her, on the parapet, lay the bronze thing which Lelian had wrought.

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A pretty toy; it worked well. "I must say," she mused, "that old fellow with his long hair and laughable breeches — he is not such a simpleton as he looks."

Some lights went out; soon a few more. Those two ruddy flames were still ablaze, far at sea. They appeared to have grown in size; they glared angrily out of the gloom, like the red eyes of a wolf. Suddenly she remembered eyes of another kind, eyes tender and pleading; would she see them before the murky dawn, when sea-swallows begin to twitter and skim over the waves? Then indeed — then all would be well.

He was passable. Whether that grain of personal attraction, thrown into the balance, might have helped, as Theophilus fancied, to guide her conduct? No. Her friend was mistaken. The deed must be done in every case; nevermore could she lose her master, her inspirer. If he were to depart — it was unthinkable! None the less ——

"I am purging myself and changing," she decided. "I am changed. He is the last."

The reign of Heussa, Queen of Terrors, was drawing to its close.

And now a breeze sprang up, fraught with chilly moisture from the low-lying plain. She shivered, thinking, perhaps, of all the comforts in that chamber down below. And still she

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waited, with eyes fixed upon that door which led, by a stairway of cedar-wood, into the lower regions of her tower. Dawn was at hand. . . .

"The Christian preacher, I think."

"Indeed? Go to bed, Harré." The devoted blue innocent, as usual, tripped off.

Filled with a wave of deep content, she picked up the bronze thing which Lelian had made, and descended the steps, as usual.

As usual — ah, well!

He went.

A portico was worth a preacher.

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CHAPTER XVIII

NOW the town took wings, and soared aloft. It happened — none knew how. Yet all proceeded naturally, despite the feverish bustle and movement in the streets and, above all, down by the harbour. There, on those congested quays, was a ceaseless unloading of foreign merchandise — ebony and other rare woods for veneering, ivory and tortoiseshell, metals of many kinds, dyes, ornamental stones such as had never been seen in the land before. Foreign craftsmen, too, began to appear on the scene; they worked in mosaics and statuary, they laid down complicated pavements and encrusted the buildings with alabaster traceries or fairy-like devices in gypsum.

Whence had all these things come? They arrived — on one knew how. They seemed to arrive quite naturally. It was inferred that Theophilus had ties of friendship and business connections in many countries, his messengers going to and fro, while he himself remained on the spot, superintending matters of detail, of interior decoration, as well as far-reaching changes that were already giving the place a new aspect. Those

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clumsy colonnades and savage wall-paintings — they went. A suburb was laid out beyond the northern gate, shady promenades grew up on the outer side of the ramparts, musty old courtyards were replaced by gardens and trim fountains; there was a watch-tower now, half completed, at the harbour entrance and a new aqueduct, a stilted monster more wondrous than the first, began to stride like a giant across the plain. Ah, Theophilus! He was different — he was altogether different from those earlier helpers. So thought the princess. He was ever-present and had lost all his sulkiness and nervousness. He had the gift of inspiring others with his own zeal; he kept pace with her ideas, and his army of workmen kept pace with him. There was no doubt about it: Theophilus knew his business. He rose to the occasion. He performed wonders. He surpassed himself.

The citizens, all save that cantankerous conservative section to which Lelian belonged, were delighted with this blossoming. They looked with joy at those temporary sawmills and marble mills, the factories of cement, the smoking kilns where they wrought tiles of many glazes — blue or green or fire-tinted like brass, the smithies sputtering flame; they gladly endured the streets obstructed, for the while, with mortar-troughs and mountains of building blocks and masons'

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gear and scaffoldings and ladders. It was all for the adornment of their city; that city whose like was not to be found in the West. The princess watched this transformation in ecstasy, wondering whether it could be real. "I shall wake up presently from my dream," she would say — "with what sadness!" For everything went as she desired it; nearly everything; not quite everything.

She would have wished, for example, to improve the façade of that massive old structure, the former college of Manthis, lumber-room of rusty armour, in order to make it harmonize with the rest of them, beautified, as they now were, with snowy fronts and a line of graceful balustrades. It stood there all forlorn and out of place in its new surroundings, as though it had been unaccountably overlooked in the general rejuvenation of the street. Theophilus, to her surprise, refused to have it altered and, on her insisting, became so rude as to call her a "tasteless young woman," a speech which nearly made her cry, so obsequious had she grown to his praise or blame. Then she began to wonder at this singular whim on his part. "He is trying to please the druidess," she concluded.

Now it was true that Manthis never took kindly to Theophilus, although he left her girls severely alone. Maybe she was secretly vexed at

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herself for not being able to read his *Awenn* — a thing which had never happened to her before. Whatever may have been the reason for her antipathy to him, the princess, in this case, was mistaken. Manthis was not easily pleased or displeased about matters of architecture; she strove to mould the heart of man, not stones. Theophilus and his notions were no concern of hers. She told the young lady that she cared nothing what happened to that building; the place had served its end; she had no further use for it, seeing that her children, thank Belen, were safe on their island. Then she took occasion to drop some guarded but weighty words . . . *whither trending?*

Whither trending?

Manthis being the only person on earth, save Theophilus, for whom the princess felt a certain awe, those words caused her so much anxiety that she finally repeated them to her friend.

Whereupon the Greek, for the first time since she had known him, burst into a fit of genuine laughter. He cried:

"Fancy listening to that unmentionable old she-fool!"

"You said, Theophilus?"

"Manthis would clip your wings. She would make you bear children."

The princess shuddered.

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"I believe you are right," she replied, after a pause. "Children. . . . The things she teaches those girls! That poem, of which nobody has ever understood a single word, and which takes twenty years to learn ——"

"While we rear a city in twenty days."

"I have heard them chanting parts of it, Only think! My parents were once on the point of sending me to her college. What a prospect! Manthis wants us to be like ants, who spend their lives in collecting food for their offspring, and then make more offspring in order to be able to collect more food. Toiling for eternity to nourish creatures yet unborn, and all exactly alike. What a prospect. She says women need only want ——"

"Women want all the time."

"She knows nothing of women," replied the princess. "She thinks they should be like herself."

"She thinks of usefulness. What have we to do with usefulness? She ends, where we begin. Manthis is the herd that procreates. We are the lonely ones, who create."

"You are right, Theophilus."

She had accustomed herself of late to say "you are right" even on those occasions when her friend was manifestly in the wrong.

If the external character of that building re-

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mained as it was, its interior underwent a change. A handful of those once-despised dwarfs were ordered to cleanse the place, to furbish up the mildewy weapons and range them in good order. They finished the work in a single night; it was little short of a miracle. Those bucklers and war-chariots and other forgotten military implements — they gleamed as in the fighting days of yore. Then Theophilus bought many more things from the citizens, ancient tapestries and enamels and jewellery and garments, and stored them within.

"On sunny days," he told the princess, "our visitors may inspect your garden of beasts. When it rains, they shall come hither to read within these walls the history of the town and extract therefrom a noble pleasure."

"A happy idea," she replied musingly. "I begin to understand."

"Lelian the armourer shall live here. He can explain the meaning of these objects better than any one."

She hazarded:

"Are you trying to please the old man?"

"There is no pleasing Lelian. He thinks the end of the world is at hand."

Theophilus happened to be right. There was no pleasing Lelian. He agreed to the proposal — who could refuse the princess anything? Had

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he not watched her growth with a kind of sacred joy, and fashioned brooches and bracelets for her, in sport, when she was still a little child? He therefore accepted the position, but fulfilled his duties in a half-hearted, gloomy, and indeed unsatisfactory manner, moping and mumbling about the place, or fondling the old arrows and then shaking his head dolefully. He spoke little; his hand shook; a palsied lethargy sat in his bones. It was as if the associations of that spot filled him with unutterable grief. He grew ever more silent, more dejected, sitting there for long hours, with bowed head and one finger laid along his nose. "Let me think," he would say.

They were on the point of sending him home to his workshop when one day, on entering, they beheld a sorrowful sight. Lelian stood in the centre of what had once been the girls' Hall of Assembly, upright as though rooted to earth, with eyes fiercely staring. An apparition of the past! He was crowned with a garland of flowers and decked in armour from top to toe; a sword hung at his side, a shield on his arm, and in either hand he grasped a mighty lance, firm-planted on the ground. There he stood plumb, with legs apart like a warrior of bygone ages — stark mad.

Theophilus turned aside. The spectacle seemed to cause him pain.

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"Old times," said the princess, while a shadowy recollection of Kenwyn's visit to the armoury flitted through her mind. Then as her eye, more trained to beauty than in the days of that Christian, lingered admiringly on Lelian's mail-clad form, she added:

"I must say, he looks well. He is the fairest object in this building. If all men lost their wits so prettily, the world would be a brighter place."

Her companion observed:

"He has a reputation to keep up."

"He had, my good friend."

It was the same with the king's palace. Theophilus refused to touch a stone of that structure, which therefore remained (so the princess vowed) hopelessly barbaric and out of keeping with the rest of the city. Many a time had she tried to impress her own notions upon the building; her father insisted upon leaving it untouched. Now she counted on the Greek, and he also failed her. Again she marvelled at his decision. "He is trying to please the old man," she concluded, remembering how sternly her parent had forbidden any alterations in the simple military character of his dwelling. Again she was mistaken. The monarch appeared to be indifferent to what happened to his own or any other house; almost dazed, in fact, with the re-

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cent turn of events, though he still took delight in "directing the operations" as he called it, and splashing himself with mortar and ordering the masons about. Maybe he fancied he was building the town as in the days of that Roman engineer who, forty years earlier, in fear and trembling, had laid out those quays and roadways under his superintendence.

The princess implored Theophilus to let her have her way.

"So dingy and full of draughts! And only one storey! Do let us make it habitable! That banqueting hall, with its uncomfortable benches! I beseech you, Theophilus, in the name of beauty ——"

"Is there no beauty in its grim outlines? Must everything be new and glittering? Must I violate my feelings in order to humour your mischievous caprices? Come now! Have you no respect for such memorials, for those wonderful grey blocks with their tawny lichen, and the story they tell? Are you never going to grow up? I am shocked at your lack of reverence."

"Forgive me! Help me to understand. I think I see your point of view."

"I fear not."

"Now I have grieved you. Oh, Theophilus — why are you so sensitive?"

The monarch remained indifferent. That ven-

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erable personage had changed considerably. His face was now fat and rosy and smiling; men said he had grown younger — younger and fonder. He still rode along the sea-wall; he still befuddled himself and played chess; he still talked abundantly — more abundantly than ever, they declared, and to less purpose. Sometimes he said bitter and dark words. As to altering his palace ——

"It's all one to the king," he remarked cheerily. "All one! I made a couple of wars and founded a city, and now they may do what they please. The stupid old house, always standing there! Let them pull it over my head. Let them paint it green, inside and out, and themselves too. I will direct the operations as usual, though these workmen, I must say, are apt to set my nerves on edge. There is only one thing I still desire, and it never comes. . . . Old men are sometimes unhappy. . . . She could have it this very moment, if she cared to ask for it. What says Ando?"

Ando wagged his head and said a good deal; nothing to the point.

"You are a dull dog, Ando; a moulting pelican. Bad company for a king."

In this respect the court prophet was neither better nor worse than the rest of them. They

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were all dull dogs; no one understood what was weighing on his mind save possibly the queen, who kept her own counsel. She, poor lady, had not grown younger; she was sadly aged. She wandered about the house in tremulous and bewildered fashion, and spent long hours counting the spoons, even those of wood and horn, "for who knows what will happen next?" she said. There was often a tear in the corner of her eye, while she begged her daughter to visit the palace —"not for myself, dear child, oh, not for myself! Only to give pleasure to your poor old father." In vain. The princess always had something else to do. She kept out of the way of her parents, and seemed to have forgotten their very existence. She never gratified them, nowadays.

How hard she had grown — so far, at least, as these old folks and their wishes were concerned!

The only thing she cared for was the good opinion of Theophilus, whose slightest word of reproach would make her wince and feel ashamed. Yet there was no cause for shame. Everything proceeded as by a miracle. The town was putting on a fresh and definite face; doubts and hesitations and experiments were at an end. Would it ever be completed? Sometimes, inflamed with a fateful sense of hurry, she de-

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spaired of that result. Still so much to do! She had found it granite; she would leave it gold.

Gold. . . .

Those dwarfs — it was almost past belief. She smiled at her folly remembering how, not long ago, she thought to have exhausted their capacities and had actually been on the verge of dismissing them. What would she now do without their aid? For Theophilus woke them up; stirred their ambitions and wheedled new tricks and secrets out of them, among other things, the art of crushing gold into powder and therewith overlaying rock or marble, or even glass and woodwork, with a coat of shining metal. The town, in consequence of this discovery, glowed more beauteously than ever. Yes; she would leave it gold. The dwarfs' work! And their health and spirits were altogether restored. How joyously they danced now, and how their songs resounded, in that queer village beyond the eastern gate where, under a grove of moist apple trees, the princess had set apart a piece of ground for their habitation! With what strange obeisances, bending low to earth, they used to welcome Theophilus whenever he deigned to accept their hospitality at one of those little moonlight feasts! The young lady indeed never quite understood the reason for these signs of profound adoration; often, on witnessing them, a certain

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thought would obtrude itself, a thought she dared not formulate and which Kenwyn, with his dying breath, had contrived to instil into her mind—"tomorrow, tomorrow," she would then say, adding to calm hesrelf: "No wonder they venerate him, with talents like his." It had become her habit of late to put off all troublesome reflections.

What happened to Yuxo was amazing. He was a bright little fellow once more, young and lively as in the days when he volunteered to tramp over the hills and fetch Harré away from his blue parents, bearing, in exchange for him, a couple of rosy sea-shells (the Alloquisti were inland folk). It was the greatest miracle of all.

"You are a wizard, Theophilus," she cried. "How did you do it?"

"By kindness."

"Kindness . . . I remember now! You once said we must be kind to workers in metal."

She surveyed the head-man and pondered upon his case. She called to mind that harassed, demon-haunted imp, that caricature of a dwarf, chattering nonsense and convulsed with nervous twitchings and quakings. The same Yuxo. . . . Blithely he sang now, and frolicked, and hammered — first at the revel, first at the forge! His hair had grown brown and glossy; that impediment of speech was healed. There was an

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end to babble about screws, and the cool rhubarb leaf was seen no more.

Kindness ——

It was then that the princess realized, for the first time in her life, what kindness could do.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE sun had gone to rest. Workmen trooped in boisterous crowds to their homes; a calm fell upon the city. The princess and her friend were in the newly finished portico, discussing multitudinous projects. They sat overlooking the sea, whose waves broke with unwonted violence against the foundations of that wonderful structure. A veil of twilight was falling; the full moon rose up grandly over mountain tops in the East.

The young lady found herself in excellent humour. Her companion, on the other hand, seemed to be more preoccupied than usual.

Suddenly he said:

"The key, princess."

"I know. You have often asked me to take it from him. So I will."

"You could have it this very moment, if you cared to ask for it." He added, tentatively: "No harm, by the way, in giving pleasure to that old man. It is ever so long since you have seen him. And you are the only person to whom he would give it."

Bother the old man, thought the princess.

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"Therefore ask, and it is yours."

Tomorrow, tomorrow, she thought.

"Tomorrow may never come," observed the Greek, as though in answer to her unspoken words.

"Tonight, then. I promise."

Even while uttering those words, she meant to break her promise. Much as she liked to oblige her friend, she had already made up her mind not to visit the palace, and this, in spite of another undertaking she had given her mother to appear in the course of that very evening. Why? She knew not why. Sheer wrongness: wrongness and pride! It was not those dancers from the far East who had just arrived and were to present an exhibition of their skill at her tower tonight; such folks often came nowadays, and she could have made arrangements for their performance to take place at any hour she pleased. No. Something else had entered her being and impelled or inspired her not to ask for that key. She wondered herself what it was, this spirit of perversity, this force which drove her to act as she did.

"The All-Highest ——" Theophilus began.

"Still thinking about the All-Highest?"

"He cares little what means he employs, so long as he attains his end. The key!"

"Tonight. I promise."

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The subject was beginning to weary her; it was setting her nerves on edge. To change the theme of conversation, she remarked:

"How high the tide is! And vapours are rising up. We shall have a downpour shortly. Did you ever notice that the weather is apt to turn at full moon?"

"I did. I have also made a little calculation, princess. The tide will not be full for a good while; it will then be higher than it has been for many long years. If the sluice-gate should be opened! The key ——"

"Look! I perceive a small boat, ever so far away. It is making for the harbour. Do you see it, out yonder? A singular build, and painted green, like a little pea. More like an apple," she said, after a pause. "Bringing wine from the Narbonnensian province, if I am not mistaken."

The princess was mistaken.

Theophilus knew the vessel. He merely observed, as though speaking to himself:

"They are great friends just now — Aithryn and the All-Highest. When two good folks put their heads together, you may be prepared for the worst."

"Still thinking about that funny little man? How distrustful you are! We have got rid of the Christian, anyhow. He would have been a third."

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Her friend said nothing, while the young lady's musings wandered backwards awhile to that evening, that sultry evening in her tower, and to what followed. She shuddered as a certain thought, which she dared not formulate, passed through her mind.

"It was rather unpleasant," she said. "He cursed you ere he died, and called you ——"

"Pray don't distress me by going into details," he interrupted hastily. "I am sufficiently troubled. It is a most annoying state of affairs, and enough to make any one low spirited, I assure you."

He buried his face in his hands.

"Why be sad? Follow my example. I don't care a pin about him; not a pin. What do we want with monks here? Good riddance!"

"You are rather a callous girl."

"Now I have grieved you again. Oh, Theophilus — will you never grow less sensitive?"

He shook his head despondingly, and said:

"The key."

That settles it, she thought. Nevermore will I ask for that key. . . .

She never asked for it. She never approached the palace at all, despite her promise. Had she done so, her nerves would certainly have been set on edge. For a sense of unusual gloom and un-

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easiness reigned in those halls; the queen could do little to enliven the company, and nothing whatever to make them feel really at home. There was a scared look in her eye; she wandered about like a ghost.

The king kept his dazed disappointment to himself. He drank deep. It was his approved method of combating perturbation of mind and unpleasant thoughts. All agreed that he had seldom been quite so fuddled, quite so military; that he was well-nigh drunk. It was almost impossible to avoid beating him at chess — Ando beat him twice, which made him moodier than ever. So the evening wore on. And still he dipped his nose in the tankard, chattering mirthlessly, meanwhile, of porpoises; of porpoises and daughters. It was soon observed that he could no longer pronounce his words correctly. He had reached *high-water* mark, and ought to have been put to bed. The queen, for some unexplained reason, contrary to all precedent, and as though some demon inspired her, refused to interpose her authority to that end. Suddenly a familiar idea seized the old man. He cried, in tones of command:

"Bring hither a strumpet — a trumpet, straight or curved."

They went down, as often before, into the trumpetry, and fetched up an old instrument of

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Tyrrhenian make, bent in the shape of a swan's neck — its mouth opening savagely like the gullet of some wild beast.

"This is music to make the world tremble. Let us blast a blow and see whether it sounds the same as of yore, when I used to summon my enemies ——"

He puffed out those old cheeks and blew his hardest. Nothing came out of the relic save an inauspicious, melancholy, wheezing note. None the less he repeated, word for word the traditional formula:

"Now, where is the enemy? Skulking, as usual?"

It was at this moment that a stranger entered as if in answer to the challenge.

Nobody took notice of him at first; men came and went; it was an easy-going, cosmopolitan place. None the less, it became plain from his manner and appearance that he was of a rank high enough to be introduced to the sovereign, to whom he was soon telling some untruthful tale about himself. The newcomer evidently understood how to make himself agreeable, for a smile came into the old man's face. "Where," he wondered hazily, "where have I seen those eyes before? Belen alone can tell! Strangely familiar. . . ."

He was more fuddled than he had yet been.

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Not too fuddled, however, to do his duty. Right royally he pulled himself together.

"You play chess?"

"Not very well, I fear."

"Then I will teach you. This one, for example, is the Fool ——"

"But I can drink," said the other, modestly.

What drove him, that abstemious man, to utter those words?

He drank, and seemed to grow younger and ever more witty; he sported and told tales, his eyes flashing with merriment; he was like a man possessed. They formed a circle round him; everybody listened. And still he drank and jested, while the hours passed. An infection caught them all; they did as he did, laughing and drinking uproariously. The stranger alone seemed to have his wits still about him — the rest of them were soon sprawling about. It was the first time in the history of the court that such a thing had happened. As for the king, a wave of rollicking mirth swept over him, and drowned him. The last they understood of his talk was when he likened his handsome and amusing guest to a "shipload of young sailor boys"— one of those many dark utterances in which he had indulged of late and which nobody, not even Ando, could interpret. After that, he grew speechless.

Where was the queen?

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She had disappeared. Somebody noticed her, tottering out of the room as in a dream, on the appearance of the stranger.

Only one person saw what then took place. It was the blue pest who, after spending the greater part of the evening in the kitchens, poking his nose into everything and teasing the maids and scullions, had strolled in among the assembly, as usual, to see what was going on. And when the stranger left the building he followed into the night, unseen and unheard, as he thought. For waves were clashing — never had they clashed so loudly, and the moon strove vainly to pierce those vapour-laden clouds. . . .

At the tower of the princess, meanwhile, a slightly different kind of society had gathered together, and a different atmosphere prevailed. The air was heavy with the cloying scent of malobathrum; lamps of glass, dangling from the ceiling in ruby-tinted globes, threw a soft light upon carpets and tapestries, and coaxed mellow gleams out of the silvery panels that lined the doorways. A water-organ was droning drowsily, all to itself, in some inner chamber.

They were watching certain dancers from the East who had grouped themselves on a raised platform; slender figures with towering headdress, swathed in citron-hued robes and a cascade

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of jewels. Their naked arms and feet were the colour of gold — gold that has lain untouched for ages. They swayed to and fro, while the faces, bedaubed with thick layers of paint, remained impassive as waxen masks. So they swayed lithely, gravely, ceremoniously, like windflowers touched by the breeze, or like the stems of water-lilies when the startled pike shoots by, troubling the green slumber of the mere. The princess was absorbed in the spectacle. On many other occasions had there been dancers at her tower; none such as these. They were clowns and posturers, those others. This was a rite. Their arms and hands, especially — those pointed fingers with tapering nails stained scarlet — they moved in enigmatic, compelling fashion. She could not help remarking to Theophilus:

"What gracious attitudes! Like idols — full of mystery. And those hands — there is witchcraft and purpose in them. Up to this evening, my friend, I thought ill of the hand of man; little I dreamt what a revelation of beauty it might become. How good it is to see new things, and ever new things! I took our hands and fingers to be mere implements for taking or throwing — imperfect, unsightly implements. Now I know better. What say you?"

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The other glanced up from his couch. He was counting those beads of his, in an agitated manner. He replied grumpily:

"I am not in the mood for discussing dancers."

"Still thinking about that key?"

At this moment she saw Harré standing at her side. The blue pest was dripping wet. She was not surprised at this; he was often in such a state, although never yet at this hour of the day, for the Alloquisti, inland folk as they were, had a great fondness for splashing themselves with water in summertime. What did surprise her, what astonished and enraged her, was that he should be there at all. He had been forbidden to enter those apartments in the evening, and had hitherto always obeyed the injunction. He might circulate freely and take what liberties he pleased at her father's palace; it was a dull place; the guests there assembled could not possibly do him harm. Here it was different. Things were to be seen (such as these dancers) and things heard which, she thought, might disquiet his imagination and be injurious to his youthful mind. The princess was severe on such matters. And therefore, without waiting for an explanation, she glanced sternly into his eyes and said:

"Look at me. The older you grow, the more disobedient. I shall now do what I threatened.

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I shall turn you into a little pig, and take you a three months' sail beyond the Sacred Rock and throw you into the sea."

"I have just been thrown into the sea."

Theophilus observed:

"He looks uncommonly wet. Ask him to explain, princess, and turn him into a pig afterwards. I should like to see a blue pig."

Harré was not clever at explaining. He had come from the palace, he said; everybody was drunk and sprawling about, even the king himself ——

"High-water mark," said the young lady angrily. "He ought to have been put to bed before that stage. What was the old woman doing?"

"The queen? She fainted away."

"Let her faint!"

Harré opened his eyes wide — never would he have dared to speak of his blue mother in such words: as to Theophilus — he shut his own. Perhaps he was shocked.

The princess went on, in a softer voice: "What more, my child? Tell me everything exactly, from beginning to end. And first of all, why are you pressing your elbow to your side in that unbecoming fashion? It is not a gracious attitude for a young person."

"Only to prevent the blood from flowing out,"

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said Harré. "That man — he tried to kill me with his knife. Then he threw me into the harbour. He must have eyes behind his head; otherwise he could never have known I was following him. It is nothing!" he added with a laugh. "You should see my father's wounds! We are prickly people."

There was a hideous gash on the left side of his breast.

"How fortunate," remarked Theophilus, delving down into his deep pocket. "I happen to have some liniment and balsam with me. What it is to be an old traveller. One never knows when one may not need these things."

"I am glad I was not wearing my deerskin," said Harré, while the Greek was bandaging his wound. "It might have got hacked about."

"Whom were you following?" the princess enquired. "And why?"

"Because I saw him take the key."

"What key?"

"He means the little red-haired man," said Theophilus, who thereupon went out, all alone.

It was true. The sluice-gate had been opened; Aithryn had done his work. Water was pouring in, and the tide not yet full! There was wild confusion down by the harbour; ships clashing against one another, and half the population endeavouring to scramble into them and escape

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the disaster. He did not linger long, but retraced his steps towards the tower.

There, beside that gateway of ruddy copper, stood a tall solitary figure, huddled in a long cape.

It was Aithryn, the father, waiting for his child.

The other went up to him in friendly fashion and, after a civil enquiry anent the state of the tide or suchlike, delicately planted that Persian stuff, that elaborate affair, that dagger, into his midriff. "One mischief maker the less," thought the Greek who, being a lonely unicorn like his charming disciple, could not bring himself to sympathize with the feelings of those that belonged to another and more respectable category.

The guests at the tower were scattered in the meantime, news of the catastrophe having leaked through. Accompanied only by Harré, the princess was gazing from the summit of that building upon the scene at her feet. It was different from what it used to be! Yet she was calm and unmoved; almost cheerful. Theophilus would never desert her. She saw the lower regions of the town already submerged; it would be some time, however, before the level of the embankment could be reached. Scared groups of folk were scurrying about with lighted torches, and

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calling to each other in many tongues. All around was darkness, and wetness, and a hungry lapping of ocean; the moon peered out of clouds upon this watery desolation. She saw, or thought she saw, the monarch her father cantering distractedly along the sea-wall on the black stallion Morvark, his mantle all aflutter in the wind. The sight brought her neither joy nor grief; she merely reflected:

"Perhaps he is looking for me, or for his old woman. He seems to ride pretty straight. I must say, he is a wonderful old man. Almost sober."

Not so Ando. He was not almost sober. He kept it up; he drank to excess that night. Unfortunately it was water, which accounted for the fact that he was never seen again. Nor was the queen discoverable for a long while. They told an unpleasant tale about her; they said that, losing sight of her consort while trying to save some object out of the cellars, she had been treacherously carried off in a Moorish vessel, sold to the Prince of Mogador, and thereafter employed by him as housemaid and, in spare moments, governess to his twenty-three daughters. The report was untrue. She lived to the end of her days with her husband, far afield, at the court of his former enemies the Volusinians, where he had taken refuge. A marvellous coin-

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cidence! For the ruler of these same Volusinians, forty years earlier, had afforded protection to yet another noble fugitive — to wit, the Roman Ormidius Limpidus, an engineer of highest capacity who, after being detected in a disreputable intrigue with some high-born dame in the household of his country's proconsul, had fled thither for safety and, after other adventures, lived to build that great embankment which was even then cracking to pieces under the onslaught of the waves.

Gazing thus calmly over a prospect all sea and moonlight, the princess became aware of a patch of dusky spots, somewhere beyond the eastern gate. They were the crowns of a certain grove of apple trees, emerging above the flood. She knew them.

"My poor little dwarfs!" she cried.

It was the first kind word she had ever spoken.

A voice at her side remarked:

"I dismissed them an hour before sunset. They are safe on the hills."

"I am glad. On the hills. . . . Tramping about the hills again, like when they first came here. I wonder in which direction?"

Involuntarily her glance turned towards the mountains. There she beheld a wondrous spectacle. A rainbow hung in the sky, a wan, nocturnal thing of mist and moonshine with colours

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feebly glimmering — the veriest ghost of a rain bow. She had never seen its like before. It drove her thoughts backwards — backwards to Kenwyn and his Christian doctrines. She said:

"Now I know. The All-Highest dislikes por ticoes. He likes preachers. Confess, my friend that he has been too much for us. You need no longer be sorry for him. He will not drown the whole world, but only our city. It is rather intelligent of him! He is old, but none too old to laugh. I think — I think he is laughing at us now. And that funny little red-haired man is also cleverer than we imagined."

She was more than resigned to her loss; looking forward, indeed, to rearing the new city of which he had often spoken. The Greek, to her astonishment, did not share this tranquillity by any means. His brow contracted at her words, and he exclaimed, in a sudden access of rage:

"Bother that envious adulterer, who destroys his own daughter's work and drowns a few thousand folk that have never done him any harm. A pretty trick; retribution, they call it. I did my best to improve your town, and this is what happens. And bother the All-Highest! Always meddling and muddling! As if there were not things enough to be amended in his own department ——"

"What an outburst, Theophilus. I have

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never seen you in such a state before. You are not rising to the occasion; in fact, if I may say so, you seem to be losing your temper seriously. Calm yourself. Play with your beads."

"Bother my beads!"

The princess did not know what more to say at the moment. Presently she enquired:

"Tell me, what became of the little red-haired man?"

"He went," said Theophilus savagely.

"I am glad. Parents are queer folk, as you have already observed. And you listen to me. Have you forgotten what you told me about that other site for a town? Let us be off. This is no place for us. I also understood," she ventured to add, "I understood you were accustomed to such little disappointments. Seasoned, I mean. Have you forgotten?"

Her friend did not reply at once. He seemed to be lost in thought; rueful and wrestling with his spirit. After a long, despairing glance at the drowned city, he said:

"You are right, princess. This is no place for us. Hard, none the less, to see one's handicraft annihilated. I am quite seasoned, as you say — quite! At least, I ought to be. I ought never to expect anything else, no, never. I have been through so much trouble of this kind — if you only knew! And yet — ah, princess, why was I

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not born with a stony heart like yours? It has been denied me; and therein lies the bitterness. Do what I will, I grow attached to my work. It breaks me, to watch the agony of fair things. I would give all my wealth, down to the last farthing, if such shocks could be avoided; truly I would. A positive wrench, every time ——"

"Don't cry over it, my good friend. I also know something about shocks and wrenches. I had a little one not long ago." She was thinking of that Christian, and of the copper contrivance which Lelian had made.

"You are right," he replied in calmer mood. "The embankment is about to crack. The sea will sweep over it in an hour or less. Look at the water rising. . . . All in vain! Can you bear the thought of it? And things were doing so splendidly; it is indeed discouraging. It hurts! . . . Well, let us be off then. No harm, by the way, in taking this little nightmare of yours with us. I like his spirit. But ——"

He turned to Harré with a faint smile:

"My young friend will have to learn that the human body looks better without blue paint. He might also begin wearing a shirt, or something."

"My mother," said Harré, "— she told me I had a reputation to keep up."

"A young man can live without a reputation, but not without a shirt."

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The princess observed:

"You will never persuade him to change his clothes."

"That you won't," said Harré.

"Won't I? And now come. My boat is waiting. We will go to the place I mentioned, where there are no disagreeable rainbows ——"

"No rainbows?"

"I think not," said Theophilus.

They went.

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CHAPTER XX

THE druidess was stirring at daybreak; moving upwards by that garden path to where, close beside her favourite seat, she was wont to perform certain eastward-glancing rites in honour of Belen the Sun, fructifier of seeds, lord of light. Arrived at the spot, she looked down as always over the tree tops of a young plantation and rows of trim vegetables in the direction of the city, one corner of whose mighty embankment and brazen turrets could be seen far away, gleaming across the water and overhung, on these summer mornings, by a roseate canopy of sea-mist and ascending smoke.

The city: where was it gone?

Nothing met her eye; nothing save a watery expanse — leagues and leagues of green ocean, weltering right up to the foot of the distant hills. Nothing!

The city was drowned.

Manthis was not unprepared for what she saw. None the less, she staggered under the blow, and a multitude of questions began to assail her. Then, mindful of her duty, she raised aloft her arms in that customary intercourse with the

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Great Fire. Straightway an immeasurable calm fell upon her. After another glance at the site of the doomed town, she descended slowly to the college to begin the day's work.

The pupils, when she entered the Hall of Assembly, observed that she had donned her girdle of pale-blue callais stones. They nudged one another, thinking, as often before:

"She is going to make a speech, a big one."

"Not a big one today," said Manthis, who could always guess their thoughts — nearly always. "My heart is too full." Then, in the fewest possible words, she told of the catastrophe; likely enough, she explained, their parents, their brothers and sisters and all the inhabitants of the town had perished. As for herself, the unseen powers would doubtless vouchsafe to her some enlightenment. Henceforth, perhaps, she must be mother to them all. It would be a heavy charge, she added, and her voice became almost inaudible. She was old, and soon to grow infirm! Such was the fate of man! She would implore counsel of the gods! A decision would be taken in due course. "Then the big speech will follow," she concluded, outwardly unmoved.

The younger ones, some of them, appeared to be unable to grasp the meaning of their loss. Others began to cry.

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"Let me see no tears on your cheeks," said Manthis. "Woman bends; she never breaks. Now think awhile, children, of what I have told you and ask, on this exceptional and distressing occasion, any questions you please."

There was no movement among them at first. Then two or three of the girls were seen to hold a consultation. Presently one of them enquired:

"If all the men are drowned, and even the young ones, and even the tiny little boys, how shall we ever ——"

She seemed to hesitate.

"Hold your head up, child, and try to speak distinctly. What do you mean?"

"I mean, when the time comes to leave the Sacred Rock, and enter upon the duties of life, how shall we ——"

"Belen will provide," said Manthis gravely. "And now lessons will take place as usual. Our morning must not be wasted. After dinner we purpose to row across and view the mischief. Or perhaps sail," she added, "since the breeze is freshening. Meanwhile, disperse!"

They dispersed. When her own class was assembled, she said:

"Our task today includes dancing and metaphysics and a little Ogham. First of all, we will rehearse what you learnt yesterday concerning

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the virtues of selago and samole. Selago! It must be plucked — how?"

"Without the use of iron," replied one of the pupils. "And the right hand must be passed through the left sleeve of the tunic, as though the gatherer were committing a theft. And the clothing must be white. And the feet bare and washed clean. And a sacrifice of bread and wine shall first be made. Furthermore, it may not be carried otherwise than in a new napkin."

Manthis nodded approval.

"And samole: how gathered?"

"Fasting," said another one. "And with the left hand. And whoso plucks it shall not look behind her or him. Furthermore, it may not be laid elsewhere save in the troughs from which the cattle drink."

The druidess enquired:

"You have understood the significance of these injunctions?"

"Oh, yes."

"All of you?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Why then," she pursued, "— why pluck samole with the left hand?"

There was silence. Nobody knew the reason.

"What says the babchick?"

"Because ——"

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Even the babchick had forgotten.

Manthis again set forth why the right hand was unfitted for so solemn a duty, to the complete satisfaction of her pupils.

Not to her own.

Later on, when lessons were over, she moved aloft once more, in order to commune with her thoughts. To the babchick, who was preparing to follow, she said:

"Now run away, child. Play with the others and bid them be cheerful. Help them to understand. Say: we shall know the truth this afternoon."

The child obeyed, wistful and somewhat disappointed. She had a thousand questions to ask. Manthis foresaw those questions; she could not be troubled with them at that moment.

Having reached the seat, Manthis loosened her girdle, disburdening herself of authority. There she reposed, hands folded on lap, no longer teacher or priestess but only an ancient dame striving to see aright. Often, on similar occasions, she had yearned for the company of some friend. She was glad, now, to be alone — to collect herself and recover, if possible, from the blow. It had been too sudden. Enlightenment would come, she knew; serenity and perhaps even joy — yes, there was some small ray of pleasure, she felt, in store for her; what could it be?

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Meanwhile, all kinds of scattered ideas flitted through her brain, which refused to bend itself to the purpose in hand. She was wearier than usual; opprssed, and almost dazed. "If I were younger," she mused, "I might confront this calamity with greater boldness."

She looked around. . . . All the familiar things, the gay flowers, the rows of beehives . . . overhead, above that cirque of grey rocks, a sunshiny meadow where the cows were pasturing. She could see their friendly forms outlined against the blue sky of midday.

She gave a long look seaward. It was true then; no dream.

And her eye, roving towards the foreground, fell upon a bare patch among the vegetables at her feet. It was where the radishes had been; those with many leaves and small root. She remembered the visit of Kenwyn, that love-distracted Christian — his wild appealing look and foolish speech; she called to mind that other Christian, that violent venerable of long ago. Much might have been learnt from either of them, had they been reasonable. Both sacrificed — a singular fatality — in a conflict with the female sex. The first one clashed with her own moral notions; the other, with the artistic ones of Heussa, Queen of Terrors. It showed, at least, what women could do, when they wanted.

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Women need only want. How teach them to want? Selago? You will never teach women to want, with selago.

Then, still nearer at hand, she caught sight of the hem of her white robe. Often had it vexed her; strange, none the less, that such trivial matters should intrude themselves at a moment like this. Too much gold, she thought; I would have it simpler. Alas, the breadth of the embroidery was fixed by tradition, iron rules. "I might as well ask for that wondrous moon of last night! Everything prescribed! I may not wear nor eat what I please; I may neither say nor do what I think truly becoming." Whether priests and teachers of future ages would be similarly hampered? Would they stumble forwards like herself, in shackles, and alone? If so, might one well despair of mankind. Uphill work, under such conditions, trying to make girls not useful but indispensable; trying to fit them for their task in life — the capture and exploitation of the male. Samole: are these the things that women ought to know? "It must be plucked fasting, and with the left hand." Why with the left hand? Miserable, worthless herbs — why pluck them at all? Why teach such rules? Tradition! And yet — and yet . . . you will never catch your male with samole, pluck it as you please.

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All the while the honey-gathering insects flashed around her like specks of burnished bronze, on their myriad voyages from rosemary bush to hive, and back again. How full of happy, wholesome purpose! Would mankind ever arrive at their perfection?

And now a sound reached her ears, an oft-heard clangour from that lustily-smitten Oriental thing — the call to the midday meal. Manthis clasped her girdle and prepared to descend. At that moment, suddenly, came the small ray of pleasure. The sinful city was gone; no great loss, she opined; perhaps even a blessing. Manifestly a blessing! For it dawned upon her that she would now be free from many kinds of annoyances, free to develop her own ideas of betterment, free to introduce or abolish as she saw fit. Farewell to selago . . . more reading and writing . . . happy social life. . . . The ray had grown brighter; so bright that its effulgence almost dazzled her. She felt like some sagacious gardener who holds in his hand a seed scarce visible, and already contemplates, with the mind's eyes, the tall and seemly growth which must inevitably spring therefrom.

"My chance," she thought, "has at last arrived."

Her pupils, when she entered the dining-hall, were surprised and pleased to see a smile upon

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her face, and the wiser of them nudged each other, thinking, as often before:

"She has made some pleasant discovery."

"An unusually pleasant one," said Manthis, who could very often read their thoughts. "Meanwhile, let us give thanks to Belen for what we are about to receive. Now, Babchick ——"

THE END

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